

QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE COMMISSIONER-DESIGNATE**Roxana MÎNZATU****Executive Vice-President for People, Skills and Preparedness****1. General competence, European commitment and personal independence**

What aspects of your personal qualifications and experience are particularly relevant for becoming Commissioner and promoting the European general interest, particularly in the area you would be responsible for? How will you contribute to implementing the political guidelines of the Commission? How will you implement gender mainstreaming and integrate a gender perspective into all policy areas of your portfolio? How will you implement youth mainstreaming?

What guarantees of independence are you able to give Parliament, and how would you make sure that any past, current or future activities you carry out could not cast doubt on the performance of your duties within the Commission?

The promise of our historically unique European Union is peace and prosperity, built on the powerful combination of competitiveness and the European social model: we have the duty to uphold this promise.

I was born in Romania, during the darkest age of the communist dictatorship. The first courageous, public calls for freedom and social justice happened in my hometown, Braşov, on 15 November of 1987. While that revolt was ambushed by the communist regime, that sparkle of hope reignited in December 1989 with the Romanian revolution and set the ground for a new direction for my country, with the EU both a promise and a dream. Those human sacrifices for values and rights that are in the DNA of the EU, such as human dignity, democracy, freedom, justice, rule of law, have always been a compass and inspiration for me and my generation, one that has fully lived the crossroads of our political destiny. Both Romania and the EU have come a long way in the almost half a century. And I would be honoured to be part of our journey ahead.

I have over two decades of professional experience in European affairs. I have worked at different levels, from County Council, to National Parliament, to national government, to the European Parliament. This has given me a deep insight into the EU's potential, and what we need to do to deliver. As Minister or Secretary of State, I coordinated Romania's programmes under the European Social Fund, implementing policies and reforms such as a systemic reform of Romania's public procurement or legislation and investment that would help the most deprived, people with disabilities, their integration in the labour market, and lead to a better life for all. I represented my country in the Council. I have always performed my duty with passion, ambition, responsibility and empathy, putting the policy at the service of people. If confirmed, as Executive Vice President I intend to put the same passion and ambition to implement the Political Guidelines, both for the specific responsibilities in my portfolio and given my broader coordination responsibilities as Executive Vice-President.

As Executive Vice-President-designate for People, Skills and Preparedness, I am privileged to have 'people', their rights and opportunities, at the centre of my political action. Based on my Mission Letter from President-elect von der Leyen, I intend to work with my colleagues in the College to deliver an ambitious agenda. We need a strong social Europe, harnessing legislation, investment and policy coordination to fight poverty, promote prosperity, and ensure fairness. We cannot afford to neglect our children, who will become the builders and beneficiaries of a better Europe, or to accept the exclusion of the disadvantaged in our society. The European Pillar of Social Rights will continue to guide our actions to enhance Social Europe. A new Action Plan, which I intend to propose in 2025, will build on a renewed dialogue and engagement with the EU institutions, the Member States and the Social Partners. I will travel in to every Member State to take forward this dialogue and arrive at a stronger action-based commitment. And I aim to conclude a new Pact for Social Dialogue, to bring new energy for more effective European policies, based on the main social actors' input.

Increasing competitiveness and productivity must go hand in hand with empowering people. This complementary approach is the basis for a strong social model. A sustainable competitiveness model can exist only with social rights and decent wages. The Union of Skills, the Clean Industrial Plan and the European Pillar of Social Rights are all indispensable building blocks for the future.

Tackling labour gaps requires a dual approach built on provision and portability of skills. I am strong to affirm that skills are a social right, where education and training for everyone starts from childhood and continues throughout the whole working life, providing opportunities for a fulfilled life, for social and economic resilience, as well. Implementing investment in people through EU support, as well as working with the private sector for more skills provision is key. In addition, measures are also necessary to ensure skills portability. I will not hesitate to work towards an ambitious legal framework to support mutual recognition and all the necessary progress on other ongoing negotiations and implementation of the labour market acquis.

The next Commission will be an investment Commission. This includes investment in people. I will focus on leveraging the European Social Fund, Erasmus+ and the Social Climate Fund, to achieve the aspirations of the European Pillar of Social Rights, to ensure a just transition and to increase our skills and competitiveness. For this, enhancing the links between investment and reforms is crucial and both should be aligned with the EU's objectives and priorities, to focus where the EU action is most needed.

The overall efforts of the next Commission to protect democracy and strengthen the rule of law are of particular importance. Improving educational achievement, enhancing equality and social rights all make a crucial contribution to building democratic resilience and support for the rule of law in a period when we are facing authoritarian threats and external interference.

I will also guide the work to foster an integrated culture of preparedness, helping people and whole of society adapt to future challenges, and preparing to respond effectively and timely to new threats we might face.

As a strong supporter of women's rights, I am proud to be part of the leadership of the European institutions and I feel a special duty to fight for gender equality as a key value and as an enabler of democratic life and of a better economy. I commit to show with my actions that the Union can grow and become stronger through equality and solidarity. In all my initiatives, I will aim to fight for the empowerment of women and promote gender equality. I will work closely with the Commissioner for Equality in this endeavour, as well as with the whole College of Commissioners. In my work to reach the 2030 social headline targets on the European Pillar of Social Rights, I aim at at-least halving the gender employment gap compared to 2019, implementing the new Barcelona targets on early childhood education and care, and strengthening work-life balance, including in telework.

It is also time for the EU to consolidate the trust of the new generation. I am looking forward to the annual Youth Policy Dialogues, which I will start in the first 100 days of my mandate. We need flexible formats to engage the young, not only through this annual Policy Dialogue but on specific key issues as well, applying a youth check to a full range of initiatives under my responsibility. I will engage with the rest of the College to ensure the implementation of youth mainstreaming.

If confirmed, as Executive Vice-President I commit to carry out my duties in full independence and with the highest ethical standards, in the general interest of the Union. I will respect the Code of Conduct for Commissioners, avoiding any situations questioning my independence and integrity and informing the President of the Commission of any potential conflict of interest. I will neither seek nor take instructions from any Government or other institution, body office, or entity. Even after my duties have ceased, I commit to ensure the confidentiality of information and respect the rules concerning appointments and benefits. I commit to comply with transparency obligations and only meet with those organisations or self-employed individuals which are registered in the Transparency Register.

2. Management of the portfolio and cooperation with the European Parliament

Can you commit to duly informing Parliament about your actions and those of your departments? In what respect do you consider yourself accountable to Parliament?

What specific commitments are you prepared to make in terms of your engagement with and presence in Parliament, both in committee and in plenary, transparency, cooperation and effective follow-up to Parliament's positions and requests for legislative initiatives? In relation to planned initiatives or ongoing procedures, are you ready to provide Parliament with timely information and documents on an equal footing with the Council?

We cannot deliver to our citizens, we cannot fully stay connected to their needs and aspirations without committing to consistent dialogue and closely prepare work with their direct representatives – you, Parliament members. Together, Commission and Parliament, we contribute to a stronger Union. Throughout my political career, I have served as local, national and European elected official. I practiced parliamentary cooperation, interinstitutional dialogue and worked for political synergies. As Minister, I proactively promoted honest and pragmatic dialogue with my national Parliament. This was a principle that guided me, beyond formal duties.

If confirmed, as Executive Vice-President I commit to taking political responsibility towards the Parliament for the activities under my portfolio, without prejudice to the principle of Collegiality. I commit to engaging in a special relationship between the European Parliament and the Commission, and to equal treatment of the European Parliament and Council in sharing information with the institutions, as it is laid down in the 2010 Framework Agreement between the European Parliament and the Commission. .

The engagement with the European Parliament is of fundamental importance to me, and I will contribute to strengthening the relationship between the Commission and the Parliament both at College level and on the areas in my portfolio. I commit to duly informing the Parliament about my actions and those of my departments. I also want to work with the Parliament in pursuing our European project and engaging with citizens: working together to bring more focus on how our policies and laws are implemented in practice on national level, can show how we are working to deliver the benefits of the EU to citizens and businesses.

Transparency is critical to good decision making. I believe that a regular presence in the main committees I will deal with, will inspire a culture of trust, transparency and collegiality, critical for our joint work, to engage with Parliament at all stages of the policy-making process. To be present in plenary debates, in Committees and in trilogues, I will organise structured dialogues with my Parliamentary Committees, to chart a way forward for any Article 225 TFEU Resolutions adopted by the Parliament calling for legislative proposals.

I believe that the exercise of Parliamentary control and Parliamentary initiative needs to be built on dialogue with the Commission. While keeping in mind the principles of collegiality and equality, I believe Executive Vice Presidents have a special responsibility in terms of dialogue with this House.

I aim to build a relationship based on openness, transparency, mutual trust, efficiency, constant dialogue, regular reporting and exchange of information. This is to allow Parliament to exercise its democratic oversight effectively, but also with a view to building consensus on policy-action. I will ensure transparency and information flow with the Parliament, notably before major events and at key stages of international negotiations. As Executive Vice President, I believe I have a special responsibility to participate in the Plenary and in the committee debates. I make myself available for bilateral meetings and direct communication with Members of the European Parliament.

I commit to work closely with the European Parliament on the basis of the 2016 Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making and the 2010 Framework Agreement and engage within the College on the revision of the Framework Agreement to strengthen joint political responsibility, dialogue, flow of information and transparency.

Questions from the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

3. The Parliament is concerned about the fragmentation of social and employment policy and its inclusion in numerous portfolios of Commissioners-designate as well as the missing social and employment dimension in Executive Vice-President-designate Roxana Minzatu's title. How does the Vice-President-designate intend to ensure that this fragmentation does not undermine the implementation of the principles of the European Pillar of Social rights? How will you cooperate with the other Commissioners to achieve these objectives? Also, would you agree to change your title to "Executive Vice-President for quality jobs, social rights, skills and education" and take necessary measures to consolidate social and employment policies and ensure efficient structures and oversight?

I believe it is a great step forward for Social Europe to have in the College of Commissioners an Executive Vice-President for People, Skills and Preparedness responsible for the portfolio of skills and education, quality jobs and social rights. I am proud and humbled to have this role, if confirmed. As Executive Vice-President, if confirmed, I will champion the integration of our social and labour market objectives throughout the Commission's work. This is essential to ensure the competitive social market economy that will secure our prosperity. And it is key to our democracy, to the health of our society, while navigating the green and digital transitions.

In the pursuit of an ever stronger Social Europe, the European Pillar of Social Rights is our compass for strong employment and social policies in the EU. A wide range of portfolios and services were responsible for the initiatives in the first Action Plan: employment, skills and social policies are widely relevant across different policy areas, and indispensable to reach their full potential. I will make sure that the objectives of the European Pillar of Social Rights are reflected into all policy areas.

If confirmed, I will ensure an ambitious new Action Plan on the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, as announced in the Political Guidelines. Strengthening Social Europe and making the Pillar principles a reality in people's lives is not a narrow mission. I will work with the other Executive-Vice Presidents, and with the Commissioners whose work I am entrusted to guide – of course, but also beyond. An ambitious and successful Action Plan will require collaboration with the entire College, such as: on housing with the Commissioner for Energy and Housing, on equality with the Commissioner for Equality, on funds with the Executive Vice-President for Cohesion and Reforms and with the Commissioner for Budget, on economic policy coordination and European Semester with the Commissioner for Economy and Productivity, on industry and internal market matters with the Executive Vice-President for Prosperity and Industrial Strategy, and on the fair climate transition with the Executive Vice-President for Clean, Just and Competitive Transition and the Commissioner for Climate, Net Zero and Clean Growth – to name just a few. The Pillar needs to be implemented on the ground – delivery cannot be an afterthought, and I will use all the opportunities available to work with the European Parliament, but also with Member States and social partners, and prioritize making a reality of the commitments on fundamental rights, skills, employment and anti-poverty in line with all 20 principles.

I understand why some might have preferred a different formulation for my title. For my part, I am excited about a portfolio that puts “people” front and centre. This is surely what the European project is all about: that our ultimate objective is to serve the people of the EU, with their different nationalities, circumstances and perspectives, and work in their interest. Everyone has their own potential and their own needs – this is the core of the work we need to deliver. Regardless of my title, my determination to work for quality jobs, social rights, skills and education, and overall for the people of Europe, is clear. If confirmed Executive Vice-President, I will use every tool available to fulfil the ambitious social objectives of this mandate.

4. Building on the La Hulpe declaration, which legislative initiatives do you commit to put forward in the new Action Plan on the EPSR, such as digitalisation at work, housing and collective bargaining, in order to achieve the 2030 targets? What concrete measures and actions will you propose to tackle critical skills and labour shortages in European labour markets and to create good opportunities in all regions of Europe? How will you ensure that all workers, especially low-skilled workers, can benefit from the Union of Skills and can enjoy the right to training as well as equal access to upskilling and reskilling programmes, especially in light of the green and digital transitions?

What concrete measures and actions will you propose to facilitate labour mobility, ensuring a strong and empowered European Labour Authority (ELA), and further modernisation, simplification and digitalisation of social security coordination, as stated in your mission letter?

Moreover, what new and revised occupational exposure limit values on hazardous substances are you planning to propose under the EU OSH legislation, ensuring a level playing field for businesses?

The European Pillar of Social Rights is the right compass to guide us in our continued efforts to build a socially just and sustainable Europe. Our social standards are an important dimension of the social market economy model and central to our competitiveness in the long run. If confirmed, I will launch in 2025 a new Action Plan on the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights to strengthen current policies and introduce new initiatives. I want to amplify our dynamics to at least reach our 2030 EU headline targets on employment (78% employment rate, at least halving the gender employment gap), skills (at least 60% of Europeans participating annually in training and promoting access to basic digital skills for at least 80% of people aged 16-74), and on poverty reduction (reduce the number of people living in poverty or social exclusion by at least 15 million compared to 2019 figures, including 5 million children). But I also want to further look into how we provide not just employment, but quality jobs. The Action Plan will announce legislative and non-legislative measures to ensure we reach our social ambitions.

I want a Quality jobs roadmap to be our new paradigm that will allow us to fully exploit the opportunities that new technologies and digital ecosystems bring for innovation, increased productivity and competitiveness. I will continue the work in relation to the right to disconnect and telework, reflecting our dedication to workers' rights in the digital age. What is a right off-line, should also be a right online. We will also continue collecting evidence

for a new initiative on algorithmic management, incorporating the ‘human in control’ principle in the world of work. I will invest full support into strengthening social dialogue and collective bargaining, building on the Minimum Wage Directive and the 2023 Council Recommendation on social dialogue. I will start by proposing, early 2025, a new Pact for European Social Dialogue, working together with European trade unions and employers. Collective bargaining and social dialogue are in fact essential for a flexible and inclusive adaptation to the upcoming challenges of European labour markets, connected to the three transitions: green, digital and demographic. Workers’ and their representatives’ right to information, consultation and participation is key to enable them to have an active role in anticipating and managing the digital and green transitions.

As regards housing, I will support the work of the Commissioner for Energy and Housing steering the European Affordable Housing Plan, ensuring it has a robust social component that caters to the needs of the most vulnerable, including those experiencing homelessness, for which the housing first principle is the optimal approach.

To confront labour and skills shortages, the Commission has already put forward different key initiatives, in particular the Action Plan on Labour and Skills Shortages, which underlines the specificities of regions. As stressed in the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, decent working conditions are vital to attract and retain workers, while strong collective bargaining, adequate and fair wages, supporting inclusive growth and preventing in-work poverty are essential also to address labour shortages in the EU. We have learned this during the pandemic crisis, especially in the care sector. For this reason, I will work to create a coherent framework for addressing long-term care workforce challenges, not only with the aim to facilitate the recognition of skills and qualifications, but also to improve working conditions.

The development of a Union of Skills will be at the heart of our approach: to address labour and skills shortages, and to unleash the potential of individuals. Skills are also indispensable for us to face – individually and collectively – the challenges of change and to make the green and digital transition also a socially just transition. Skills are a social right; a right that everyone should continue to benefit from childhood to old age. The goal will be that everyone gets the education and training they need at every stage of the working life, to be agile in today's constantly evolving world – and then to ensure that these skills can be deployed across the EU in the labour market, meeting at the same time the aspirations of those with the skills, and the needs of employers. I will prepare an ambitious Skills Portability Initiative to ensure that skills travel and are recognized with mobility in the labour market.

The foundation of our Union of Skills is policies and investment in basic skills, supporting teachers, and targeting our work on key needs such as the area of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). This will be backed up by strengthened work on digital education and training. I will also propose ambitious and targeted measures to boost vocational education and training (VET) with European added value, taking inspiration from what happens in tertiary education in Europe. To be inclusive, education and training providers should also offer new opportunities for learning, including digital. We need to make use of AI and data-driven feedback and guidance, as well as targeted measures boosting the provision of digital skills. We need flexible learning pathways, skills- and competence-oriented, interdisciplinary, cross-cultural, and cross-border learning. To deliver on the 2030 target on skills, I will explore ways to further strengthen the Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs). By empowering everyone to take-up training, ILAs make the right to training a reality in practice and I will work with Member States to take forward ILAs, in particular through mutual learning support. Another key element is micro-credentials, which support skills development and employability, by certifying the learning outcomes of short-term learning experiences, very relevant for the green, digital and social transitions.

Quality jobs mean also fair labour mobility. First, we need to complete work still on the table: I will work intensively with Parliament and Council to help finding an agreement on the revision of the social security coordination Regulations. I am aware of the complexity of this file and stand ready to propose innovative approaches building on the progress made so far.

Secondly, the Commission is completing the evaluation of the European Labour Authority. Based on the findings of the evaluation and taking into account the input received in the Parliament’s Resolution, I will further focus on how to strengthen the European Labour Authority’s work. Thirdly, I will present a comprehensive vision on digitalization of services, including to facilitate posted workers declarations. This will be based on the two pilot projects on the European Social Security Pass, which are expected to present their results in the second half of 2025.

I will also work with other Commissioners to deliver on the commitment in the Political Guidelines to develop rules on recognition of qualifications of third country nationals, simplifying procedures and removing unnecessary

barriers. This will join initiatives such as the EU Talent Pool and Talent Partnerships to show an EU open to welcome talent and able to attract people with the right skills to match EU labour market needs.

With regards to new and revised occupational exposure limit values on hazardous substances, the Commission has reduced the time lags to set values at EU level, but I want us to be faster. I will be looking at this in depth, as our workers need protection from exposure to hazardous chemicals and companies need a level playing field. The EU Strategic Framework on health and safety at work 2021-2027 sets out the substances to be the focus for the near future, and I am determined to carry this work through and protect workers at risk. This also applies to preventing deaths and accidents in the workplace in all aspects including psychosocial and musculoskeletal risks. In this respect, I want to reconfirm the “vision zero” approach aiming to prevent work-related deaths and I will work to encourage prevention with regards to specific hazards stemming from climate change, such as heat stress or severe weather events, as well as to better incorporate psychosocial risks, e.g. those linked to the digital transition. Much of this work relates to the strong ambitions of the new Commission to protect mental health for Europeans.

Last, but not least, I will be a strong promoter of the social dimension of the European Semester in an integrated approach between economic and social policies. I will work to further integrate the Social Convergence Framework in the Semester. My work will focus also on social investments and reforms, including by improving monitoring and evaluations tools, such as distributional impact assessment, to measure their economic as well as social returns. These tools will be essential for the sustainability of all European policies.

5. Around 95 million people in the Union live at risk of poverty and social exclusion, including 19 million children. Even 11% of workers are exposed to this risk. Which concrete legislative initiatives will you propose in the context of the first ever EU Anti-Poverty Strategy, announced by Commission President-elect Ursula von der Leyen? What role will the European Semester and the European Child Guarantee play in this strategy to ensure progress towards the EPSR Action Plan goal of reduction of poverty? How will you ensure the next MFF does more to eradicate poverty and social exclusion? Beyond the Council recommendation, what concrete follow-up measures will you give to calls from the European Parliament to guarantee the adequacy, and increase the coverage and take-up of minimum income schemes?

Will you present a Directive on adequate minimum income in order to ensure the reintegration of people absent from the labour market while respecting the subsidiarity principle and the specificities of national social protection systems?

President-elect von der Leyen stressed in her Political Guidelines that Europe’s way of life depends on the protections and opportunities of our social model and our social market economy. If confirmed Executive Vice-President, I will develop the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy that will be effective in supporting those who are most disadvantaged in our society and in addressing social inequalities. The level and new types of poverty and social exclusion in Europe remains unacceptable to me. And child poverty does not have a place in our prosperous society. If we want to succeed in building a more competitive Union, anchored in a sustainable, green economy, fuelled by the new technology, resilient when faced with crises, politically solid, then our horizontal angle must always be to fight poverty through every decision and policy we put in place.

Our EU Anti-Poverty Strategy should provide a new impetus at EU-level to the reduction of poverty and social exclusion. The starting point must be the root causes of poverty, such as inequality and social injustice, low incomes, weak labour market attachment, gaps in access to social and essential services, affordability, to name a few.

Of course, the commitment of Member States to act decisively will be key for the delivery of the Strategy. Since the Porto summit of 2021, we have a clear target to reach by 2030. Specifically, we must aim to, in terms of social inclusion and social protection policies, reduce the number of people living in poverty or social exclusion by at least 15 million (compared to 2019 figures), including 5 million children. We must also give particular emphasis on breaking the generational cycle of poverty as well as advancing social mobility. This will require further substantial efforts – around half of the Member States experienced a noticeable rise in the number of persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2023, making the 2030 target more challenging to meet.

I will strive to ensure that those who can work are helped to get a quality job as a way out of poverty. Poverty concerns people of all ages, starting from childhood to the active age upwards to old-age poverty. The risk of poverty and social exclusion is higher for women. And social exclusion is often linked with discrimination and structural inequality in society. I will mainstream the work on the Strategy and address it in conjunction with our work on a Union of equality.

Over one-fifth of the EU population living in households with dependent children was at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2023. In the Strategy, I will look into care and how to strengthen the access to quality affordable care for families, and quality jobs for the care workforce.

Our approach to poverty should also be comprehensive, going beyond employment and social policies to include education and training, health care, housing, taxation, transport, energy, food and climate policies. Working also with my colleagues, I will support the implementation of the Climate Social Fund to tackle poverty linked to energy and transport.

In line with the Treaties, the primary responsibility for addressing poverty and exclusion lies with the Member States. But the Treaties also clearly state the Union's aim to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its people – and that the Union shall combat social exclusion and discrimination, and shall promote social justice and protection, equality between women and men, solidarity between generations and protection of the rights of the child.

The European Semester will play a crucial role in monitoring and coordinating national policies to combat social exclusion and inequalities. If I am confirmed Executive Vice-President, I will contribute to the European Semester as regards social, education and employment policies, and commit to maintaining its strong social dimension. Building on the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), which supports the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and aims to reduce poverty and social exclusion, and on the new Social Climate Fund, I will work with other Commissioners to develop holistic policy and funding answers. The work to be steered by the Commissioner for Energy and Housing on the European Affordable Housing Plan and the Action Plan for Affordable Energy Prices is of particular importance to ensure that those plans have a robust social component that caters to the needs of the most vulnerable, including those experiencing homelessness.

When it comes to public financing and investment, the priority will be ensuring the use of the resources available via NextGenerationEU and the current budget. Cohesion policy, including the European Social Plus fund, is an important support for antipoverty and exclusion measures.

The New Social Climate Fund will be a strong tool in addressing energy and transport poverty and will contribute to the achievement of the poverty targets of the action plan for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. Given its objectives, it is imperative that Member States program the fund to focus on the social impacts on vulnerable groups affected by the ETS2. I will work together with the other Commissioners to ensure a focused and impactful programming of the SCF to support vulnerable households, vulnerable micro-enterprises and vulnerable transport users, through temporary direct income support and through measures and investments intended to increase the energy efficiency of buildings, decarbonisation of heating and cooling of buildings, and to grant improved access to zero- and low-emission mobility and transport

Together with my fellow Commissioners, I will ensure that its implementation fosters structural changes needed to ensure a fair and just transition, accompanying the implementation of the ETS2. As stipulated in the Regulation, the Plans – including the milestones and targets – will be evaluated based on this criterion. The SCF will provide temporary direct income support, thus contributing to alleviating poverty for the most vulnerable households.

Looking ahead, the next Multiannual Financial Framework is an opportunity to make our spending more focused, simpler, and more impactful, by linking investments with reforms to help address challenges in areas such as education, skills, combatting poverty. Both investments and reforms should be aligned with the EU's objectives and priorities to focus on areas where EU action is most needed and can have maximum impact.

The European Child Guarantee is a comprehensive and strong initiative, and Member States have demonstrated their commitment to its implementation. For me, delivering on it and making it stronger, will be a priority. We need to intensify our efforts to deliver, in particular to close the gap in access to services between the children in poverty and their better-off peers. In this perspective, I will work towards strengthening the Guarantee and provide further guidance to Member States for addressing child poverty, in particular in the wake of the 2026 Commission report to the Council on the progress achieved.

If properly implemented by the Member States, the Council Recommendation on minimum income has the potential to considerably improve the adequacy of minimum income schemes by 2030 and bring more people closer to the labour market. The focus should therefore be first on implementation of the recommendation, a strong horizontal priority of the new Commission. We will provide support to the Member States, promoting evidence-based policy making, mutual learning and the exchange of good practices through the Social Protection Committee.

The Commission and the Social Protection Committee will prepare a joint report in 2025, assessing progress with the implementation of the recommendation. Regarding in-work poverty, we will work intensively on the implementation of the Directive on adequate minimum wage, which is the main tool to ensure that entering the labour market is effectively lifting people out of poverty.

Questions from the Committee on Culture and Education

6. How do you envisage the future of EU education policy, beyond strengthening Europe's human capital to deliver effective and relevant learning that develops knowledge, skills, values and competences corresponding to a holistic vision of education and contributing to better prepared and resilient future generations? In the context of the ongoing European Green transition and clean industrial transformation, how will you actively develop strategies that tackle challenges related to access to education, basic skills, digital skills, STEM and STEAM education and European citizenship education?

We all know that education empowers individuals. So, it is my vision that a strong European education area shall empower Europe. My vision for the future of EU education policy is deeply rooted in the core values of freedom, democracy, social fairness, and shared prosperity. The European Education Area, as a common space for high-quality learning, accessible for all, is the driving force behind a shared goal of quality education, agile skills development, and inclusion. These are three key ingredients to make sure our future generations are not only well-prepared, but also resilient in the face of shocks and challenges. And, of course, a strong European Education Area lays the core foundations for our future Union of Skills.

Our EU education policy, while supporting the Member States, is about preparing individuals for the workforce, but, together with that, about preparing them for life, creating a society that values critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration. Digital and media literacy, multilingualism, and communication skills are essential for enabling citizens to navigate the complexity of a globalised world. We need close cooperation between parents, schools, communities, formal and non-formal education providers. Education should not be confined to traditional classrooms, but should go beyond and reflect the continuous interconnectedness among individuals, and respective human and cultural backgrounds.

Our world is changing rapidly. We need to create a Union of Skills that effectively stimulates a culture and a mindset of learning that is lifelong – in school, at the workplace, in the society. For this, it is essential to find agreement on a new way to define and assess investing in people, from birth to old age. Investing in education, for example that of children at risk of poverty has an unmatched medium- and long-term economic and societal returns. Ambitious measures are needed in the recognition of all forms of education and training. Simplification and digitalisation are the key principles. Our final outcome is that each person, regardless of their background or starting point, is equipped with the skills necessary to build solid professional careers and also be resilient and agile when faced with career change opportunities and challenges. Central to our success will be our policies to support teachers and trainers – their working conditions, their preparation, resources and career prospects.

If confirmed, I will aim to ensure that every child, regardless of socio-economic background, has access to high-quality education and the opportunity to reach their full potential. The ideas and recommendations in the 2022 Council Recommendations on 'Pathways to School Success' and on early childhood education and care provide a valuable starting point.

The PISA results of 2022 sound an alarm bell which cannot be ignored. We need decisive action. If confirmed, as part of the Union of Skills, I will prepare an Action Plan on Basic Skills to help counteract the worrying decline in the performance of 15-year-olds in literacy, mathematics, and science, as well as insufficient digital skills. It will focus on improving teaching and learning, supporting teachers, and promoting effective supportive environments for student success. This comprehensive approach will emphasise not only academic performance, but also the role of wellbeing and socio-emotional skills in improving educational outcomes.

Another possible initiative under the Union of Skills would be a STEM Education Strategic Plan, to enable Europe to improve the outlook in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education. This will not only address the shortage of qualified teachers in STEM fields, but also help ensure a higher proportion of girls and women pursuing STEM careers. The skills academies have already provided a very important input to curricula development, allowing many STEM sectors to train people in line with the needs of the industry. Building on this, the European Degrees will provide further impetus to the development and recognition of transnational STEM programmes. We can also integrate arts, humanities and social sciences into these initiatives to help ensure that learning factors in the real-world challenges of deploying these skills in tune with our values and social needs.

Overall, work on the European degree will need to be continued with bold determination, by working with Member States and with the higher education sector.

A modern education system must also embrace full digital transformation. The digital age presents both opportunities and challenges, and it is imperative that all citizens are digitally literate. The EU must ramp up efforts to provide digital skills at all levels, from early childhood to lifelong learning, integrating digital competencies into core curricula. The Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027 has set a solid framework, but we must accelerate reforms to achieve the Digital Decade targets. As we move forward, the EU should consider key areas like school connectivity, digital tools in the classroom, and advanced digital skills in fields such as AI, programming, and cybersecurity. Within the Union of Skills, I intend to ensure a comprehensive review of the Digital Education Action Plan.

Sustainability education is the key to a green and sustainable future in Europe. We need to make the most of key tools like the European Sustainability Competence Framework (GreenComp). Greening aspects could also be supported through the work of Teacher Academies and streamlined in the context of lifelong learning and individual learning accounts.

A strategic pillar of the Union of Skills must be stepping up vocational education and training (VET), with its crucial pathways to employment and close link to the skills businesses need. If confirmed, I will prepare a European Strategy for Vocational Education and Training. My aim is not only to boost the number of people with VET degrees, but to increase the quality, recognition and EU-dimension of this valuable type of education, thus empowering VET graduates. Our strong package of EU funds, directly managed or under shared management, play a critical role in the upskilling and reskilling workers and I will work, with my fellow commissioners, to better focus our investments on strategic sectors that also provide valuable opportunities for our youth.

I want us to be more effective in teaching our younger generations about Europe, its values, history, its shared identity built on unity in diversity. Strengthening democratic values and democratic participation, fostering European identity and active citizenship are at the heart of all flagship programmes, including Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps. Teachers have a central role in addressing and raising awareness of European values. If appointed, I will work together with the Member States to further strengthen the European dimension of teaching. If confirmed, I want to create links with the work on the Democracy Shield to be led by the Commissioner for Democracy, Justice and the Rule of Law.

Education is a unifying force and a fundamental element of all well-functioning democracies. Erasmus+ brings together young people from all corners of Europe and I will strengthen it further. Making Erasmus+ mobilities even more inclusive, especially making sure the most deprived and vulnerable are able to also benefit from the programme, is essential to consolidate, to deepen European identity, across generations and nations. Improving the experience of student mobilities, using digitalisation to make their experiences even more valuable, will be key.

7. What is your plan for the future of the European Education Area (EEA) due to be completed by 2025, in conjunction with the recognition and cross-border portability of qualifications, degrees and certification across all areas of education in formal, informal and non-formal settings? In particular, how do you intend to tackle urgent, EU wide issues such as the lack of teachers, their training and precarious professional situation?

The European Education Area is a strategy to make quality education, training and lifelong learning accessible to all, across borders, in line with the first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights. This commitment to inclusiveness and excellence in education and training is essential for ensuring that every European has the required skills - recognised across borders - to thrive in society and the labour market, and to make the Union of Skills a reality.

If I am confirmed, I will work on the European Education Area with the aim to drive a common approach to skills development, learning mobility, quality and inclusiveness. This work will be informed by the evidence emerging from the evaluation of the European Education Area, which is still under way.

A key element of the EEA is the recognition of qualifications, which is vital for learners' mobility, including under the Erasmus+ programme, and for talent circulation across Europe. While the framework is already in place, the pace of implementation has been uneven, with only half of the Member States making sufficient progress. The March 2024 Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation on a Quality Assurance and Recognition system

is another important step toward making automatic recognition a reality for all learners. To move work further in this area, a timely agreement and its decisive implementation will be my priority.

A new Skills Portability Initiative will allow us to scale up the recognition of skills and qualifications. This would provide a framework where any type of skills or qualifications acquired in one country or in one company can be recognised and accepted in another to best serve people and the labour market. It will contribute to create a true European space where knowledge, skills and talents can freely circulate.

Additionally, we must expand the recognition of certifications, particularly through the 2022 Council Recommendation on micro-credentials. These short, flexible learning options are key for upskilling and reskilling Europe's workforce, making education more adaptable to the needs of our evolving economy. I will also strongly support non-formal and informal learning, and promote its validation, including through youth work, and offer learner-centred, participatory, and innovative forms of education and training, which also support learning for active citizenship. Less formal learning environments such as youth work, sport clubs, or cultural activities can contribute to more inclusive education. If confirmed, I will also aim for a strengthened focus on the learning and skills dimension of these policies, in cooperation with the Commissioner for Intergenerational fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport.

Currently, 24 Member States are experiencing teaching shortages. This means less teaching, less support and consequently a loss of education for the next generation. It is essential both for our competitiveness, and for our social cohesion, that teaching is an attractive career. Addressing the shortage of teachers and their training needs is primarily the responsibility of Member States. However, the EU can and should support this joint effort and work with Member States, educators, social partners, civil society, and learners – to help addressing this and other persistent challenges in our education systems. To this end, if I am confirmed, I will propose an EU Teachers Agenda, focused on the working conditions, training, and career prospects of teachers across the EU. I will also look into launching a European School Alliance to encourage better cross-border cooperation and mobility between schools across Europe. Only through this joint effort – engaging Member States, educators, social partners, civil society, and learners – can we address these persistent challenges in our education systems.

8. In the EU we are faced with the reality of brain drain in the sector of higher education, how do you intend to actively tackle this issue and how do you intend to further develop the 'European University Alliances' and work on the "European Degree" to specifically address these challenges? Furthermore, how do you intend to apply lessons learnt from the current implementation of the Erasmus+ programme in preparing the next generation programme, and specifically, what is your strategy to keep the programme's core objectives and priorities considering potential future budgetary pressures?

Europe needs to be an 'both an education and a fulfilment destination' – that attracts the best talents, in all sectors, including in higher education, that is also competitive enough to retain them, in European economies and societies. For this, we need our universities to be more competitive and attractive on the global scene – no matter what region they are in. I am deeply convinced Europe has all that is needed to fulfil that ambition, including widespread academic excellence. However, fragmentation and small scale often limit our true potential. To combat this, we need universities across Europe to cooperate more and work together.

To this end, we should drive forward the European strategy for universities, which aims at empowering and strengthening higher education institutions across Europe. One of its flagships, the European universities initiative, supported under Erasmus+, brings universities from all parts of Europe, including rural areas and outermost regions, to cooperate closer together. By setting up European inter-university campuses, European Universities alliances could provide students with access to a richer and better education offer, in cooperation with research departments and businesses. This allows students to develop a broader, more varied and future-oriented set of skills and competences, as universities pool their expertise, knowledge, and resources together, and thereby combine complementary strengths not available at any single institution. Such alliances are drivers for balanced talent circulation and for providing students with unique opportunities to get a high-level degree, with inbuilt mobility - combining studies in several European countries. So we need to take these promising steps forward, incentivising more universities to join this approach and showing the benefits for educators, students and future employers.

The Blueprint for a European degree, pioneered by several European University alliances opens new opportunities for all higher education institutions to offer a highly-sought-after and generally recognised degree to their students, including in sectors that are of strategic importance for Europe. If confirmed, I will take this work forward and target the realisation of the European degree on the ground, with Member States, the European Parliament and

higher education stakeholders, for the future of our students and of Europe. I would intend to devote one of my implementation dialogues to exploring what might be holding up progress on this matter.

For more than 35 years, Erasmus+ supports people to benefit from learning mobility and to gain new competences and skills such as empathy, confidence, open-mindedness, critical thinking, respect for diversity and active citizenship. A renewed and strengthened Erasmus+ programme will promote competitiveness and social inclusion and help uphold our democratic values. Against this background, and if confirmed, I will build on the programme's achievements to make a compelling case for its next generation. Ambitions are high. The Draghi report called for an 'Erasmus for all' and this was also shown in the Europe on the Move Council Recommendation. The demand for learning mobility and cooperation exceeds what the current programme can cater for today. As set out in the Political Guidelines, we need to strengthen Erasmus+, including for vocational training. The next Multiannual Financial Framework is an opportunity to make our investment in education simpler, more impactful. Therefore, we need to reinforce existing actions, proposing improvements and further simplifications to keep pace with a fast-evolving world and to boost European and international cooperation. Erasmus+ is uniquely placed to bring Europeans closer together and promote competitiveness, inclusion, democratic participation and the EU's fundamental values.

Question from the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs

9. Given the urgent need for an EU culture of preparedness facing emerging threats that may affect our security and the safety of our society, how will you plan to contribute to build up our EU capabilities, to improve threat detection and to operationalise a coordinated crisis response in a swift and effective manner?

With the sheer increase in the number and complexity of the climate, social, technological security and geopolitical risks threatening EU, it is imperative for the EU to develop a more strategic, comprehensive and integrated approach to crisis management.

If confirmed Executive Vice-President, I will guide the work towards an EU Preparedness Union Strategy, building on the report on EU civil and military preparedness and readiness to be presented by former Finnish President Sauli Niinistö.

The goal is to forge a stronger and better prepared Union, built upon a whole-of-society, whole-of-government, all-hazards and cross sectoral approach to preparedness, and closer civilian-military cooperation.

This includes equipping citizens with the necessary skills, as part of my broader work on skills and education. The EU and its Member States must prepare for the full spectrum of man-made or natural crises and shocks, from security threats, including hybrid ones and increasingly with a cyber dimension, to disasters driven by climate change and environmental degradation, with ripple effects on other sectors of our society, such as health, social care and agriculture.

If confirmed, I will work with the Commissioner for Preparedness and Crisis Management in this endeavour. As Executive Vice-President I commit to help bringing together the many different work strands involved. I will work closely with all my fellow Commissioners and our EU Member States in a true Team Europe spirit. The EU Preparedness Union Strategy will lay the foundations that will enhance Europe's capabilities to identify and address vulnerabilities upstream through exercises and testing, and then to prevent, withstand and respond to crises, in a well-coordinated and integrated manner.

We are not starting from scratch: The EU has already developed important tools to prevent, detect and coordinate crisis response, such as the Union Civil Protection Mechanism, and we will keep building on these instruments. This includes also the EU's strategic reserve of response capacities ("rescEU") which needs to be maintained and further strengthened.

We can build on the experience of the existing sectoral crisis management tools and instruments developed in different domains, and at different levels including civilian and military preparedness, and following the lessons learnt from past crises – such as the strengthened EU health security framework established after the COVID-19 pandemic or the work on building medical counter-measures.

Under the umbrella of the Security Union Strategy, the EU has adopted a range of legislative and operational measures that have left the EU better equipped to respond to security challenges than it was five years ago. The

Commission will work closely with Member States to ensure the implementation of new legislation, which will be key to ensure the preparedness to security threats and vulnerabilities.

But preparedness can no longer be an exclusive matter of governments and institutions. Given the unprecedented complexity and cross-sectoral nature of threats, active participation of citizens, households and societal actors at local, regional and national level will be essential to strengthening EU preparedness, building new capabilities, and operationalising a coordinated crisis response in a swift and effective manner. New initiatives aimed at developing skills and capacity in crisis response can play a key role, involving social partners, educational institutions, and the private sector to make sure every citizen is prepared.

Our ability to respond to cyber threats, health threats or natural disasters is a test of our determination, and of our solidarity. We can ready ourselves by empowering people with the right skills, such as healthcare professionals and emergency responders to cybersecurity experts and logistics managers, where we face a shortage of specialised skills. Risk education will also play a key role, especially for vulnerable groups.

Building on and grouping our existing capacities, we will strengthen our anticipation, improve our early warning and detection systems and analyse the gaps in EU capabilities across sectors. The COVID-19 pandemic and the war against Ukraine have shown us how crises cascade and ripple from one sector to the next, given the extensive cross-links and interdependencies, thus requiring cross-sectoral solutions and coordination, many times with both an internal and an external dimension. I am committed to a cross-sectoral risk understanding and to promoting an anticipatory risk analysis. I am determined to make this a reality to the benefit of our society and citizens.

Question from the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

10. What initiatives do you plan to close the gender pay gap, career and pension gaps and tackle the horizontal segregation as well as promoting girls and women in STEM education and careers, and prevent discrimination for all, so that Europe can draw on all of its talent and potential? Also because of the gender gaps, the risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU is higher for women than for men. Women that have informal care responsibilities for dependent relatives risk not being able to join formal employment and are most at risk of poverty. How do you plan to improve working conditions, career development and upskilling for women in the context of the new framework for addressing long-term care workforce challenges? Regarding the first-ever Anti-Poverty Strategy planned for this Commission, how will you make sure that women in the most precarious and vulnerable situations, such as homeless women and single mothers, are reached by the new Strategy?

Equality is a fundamental value of the EU and it is an intrinsic principle for all the work that I will pursue in my function. Gender inequality is a breach of fundamental rights. And it is also a massive economic obstacle preventing the whole of Europe to realise its full potential, with long lasting impacts on our competitiveness and productivity.

Several recent EU actions already hold a transformative potential for improving women's lives and participation in the economy. This includes notably the Directives on pay transparency, gender balance on company boards, work-life balance, and adequate minimum wages. If confirmed Executive Vice-President, I will ensure the proper implementation of these instruments, working closely with my relevant colleagues in the College, and I will facilitate Member States' efforts where needed.

When it comes to tackling gender gaps in the labour market such as the gender pay gap, gender career gap, gender employment gap and gender pension gap, I will work closely with the Commissioner for Equality in developing the new Gender Equality Strategy post-2025, including our concrete actions in this area. The new Action Plan on the European Pillar of Social Rights with its principles on gender equality, equal opportunities and work-life balance will also be instrumental in that matter.

I will work to address gender imbalances and stereotypes when it comes to education and careers. For example, under the Girls Go Circular initiative, over 47,000 girls across EU Member States have already been trained in digital, entrepreneurial, and green skills, and I will continue in this direction. Moreover, with Erasmus+ we are also supporting projects that develop ways to overcome the obstacles preventing girls and women from pursuing a VET career in the net-zero technology sector and related areas. This is essential, as many of the opportunities created by the green and digital transitions will be in technical, traditionally male-dominated professions and we cannot afford not to tap into the talent of half the population.

If confirmed, I will integrate a gender perspective into the skills and education initiatives under my responsibility. And I will duly tackle horizontal segregation in the labour market. Those are important drivers of the gender pay gap. Overcoming gender disparities in STEM education will be one of the key goals of the STEM Education Strategic Plan. Adequate teaching and learning methodologies can raise all students' - including girls' - motivation, interest, and participation in STEM. Gender-sensitive teacher education can help overcome institutional barriers and promoting wider access to STEM education. Initiatives such as Girls Go Circular can be further developed through specialised training for educators in STEM subjects, providing access to teaching tools and networking, and bridging education and industry.

It is important to consider equality challenges, including gender equality in the work towards a EU Anti-Poverty Strategy. In order to address the situation of the most vulnerable, including the homeless, single mothers, and persons with disabilities, we need to address the root causes of poverty. In line with the active inclusion paradigm, I intend to consider factors such as insufficient incomes, gaps in access to the labour market and gaps in access to social and essential services, such as energy and transport. Those gaps are often of gendered nature.

Actions supporting higher female participation on the labour market would help contribute to closing the gender pension gap too, which primarily reflects the gender inequalities during working lives and the redistributive capacity of our welfare systems. We should also continue to monitor pension gaps and pay special attention to structural inequalities, discrimination and gender biases in old-age pensions.

Care is at the centre of gender inequalities and is a central part of the solution.

We see a disproportionate burden from caring responsibilities which impacts whether and how women can pursue paid work. In order to support women's labour market participation throughout the life course, we need to ensure high-quality, affordable and accessible care services across the EU and improve the situation for both care receivers and the people caring for them professionally or informally. I will therefore continue and further step up the work on the implementation of the European Care Strategy and, in particular, the two Council Recommendations on early childhood education and care, and on long-term care.