

Flash Report on the INFORM EU Social Meeting, Brussels, 5 March 2025

On 5 March the Communication Unit of the European Commission Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion organised the **INFORM EU Social meeting on “Communicating Social Europe Together”** in the framework of the [2025 Employment and Social Rights Forum](#). The meeting was attended by 57 participants, of which 46 communication officers in the ESF+ Managing Authorities and national coordinators of INFORM EU, and 11 representatives of the European Commission (DG COMM, EMPL, REGIO and HOME).

The communication priorities of the new European Commission

Sophia Eriksson Waterschoot, Deputy Director-General for Strategic Communication at DG Communication, highlighted the need for **a more agile and adaptable approach to communication in an increasingly disrupted world**. The rise of misinformation and declining trust in institutions pose significant challenges. A recent Eurobarometer survey revealed that 75% of respondents had encountered fake news in the past week. The European Commission is responding by rethinking its communication strategy to **move beyond one-way messaging**. Instead, the focus is on **two-way engagement—ensuring that policies and messages resonate with people’s real concerns**.

President von der Leyen’s message, “If it matters to Europeans, it matters to Europe,” underscores this shift. Public sentiment surveys show that peace, stability, economic security, and climate remain key priorities. The Commission is also placing **greater emphasis on local communication**, recognising that while it may seem distant from citizens, networks such as EC Representations, Europe Direct, and Erasmus+ National Agencies play a crucial role in bridging that gap. The principle that **“local is the new centre”** will guide future efforts.

Citizen engagement is another priority, with **new citizens’ panels launching this month**, starting with a focus on the long-term EU budget. Youth policy dialogues will also play a key role, with each College member expected to participate. A more collaborative approach is essential, working closely with national and local partners to **refine engagement strategies** and ensure the Commission’s communication efforts have real impact.

Advancing a fair Europe and social funding

Denis Genton, Director for the European Pillar of Social Rights and Strategy at DG Employment, reflected on his past experience working on geographic desks for Sweden, Denmark, and Italy, emphasising **the importance of linking policy expertise in Brussels with communication professionals across Europe**. A key challenge is ensuring that communication efforts reach beyond those who already support EU initiatives, **engaging more critically minded audiences as well**.

Since its launch in 2017, the European Pillar of Social Rights has been fully implemented, and efforts are now focused on assessing its impact. **The coming months will offer multiple opportunities to communicate on social policy priorities**, including discussions on the Union of Skills at the European Employment and Social Rights Forum and the development of a Quality Jobs Roadmap in cooperation with social partners. A mid-term evaluation of ESF+ is also planned, along with an ex-post evaluation of FEAD, ESF and YEI from 2014-2020, which will provide many opportunities to communication on social Europe.

Effective communication about the integration of policy and funding necessitates collaboration with the INFORM EU network, which facilitates the sharing of best practices and knowledge exchange. Denis emphasized the importance of united communication, suggesting the need for more frequent meetings.

Discussion with INFORM EU Social members

The discussion focused on how Member States and the Commission can refine their communication strategies. There was **broad agreement on the importance of aligning EU-wide messages with national and local contexts**. Several participants shared insights on innovative approaches for engaging citizens, including interactive maps, regional roadshows, and digital tools to boost visibility.

A key takeaway was **the need for more coordination to avoid fragmented communication efforts**. Some national representatives informed about plans to centralise communication at the programme level to ensure consistency. Others highlighted **successful citizen engagement initiatives**, such as local festivals, youth quizzes, and virtual reality experiences that bring EU projects closer to people's everyday lives.

DG Employment communication priorities and strategy 2026-2030

Carolien Peeters, Acting Head of the Communication Unit at DG Employment, summarised the achievements of the current EMPL multiannual communication strategy (2022 – 2025) and outlined plans for a new communication strategy. The current strategy focuses **on strengthening collaboration with partners and increasing trust in the EU as a social actor**. The “Let's Make It Work” campaign has already demonstrated the value of large-scale communication efforts, and future initiatives will build on this approach. There is a clear need to move beyond ad-hoc actions and ensure a more structured, long-term communication effort. The European Employment and Social Rights Forum replaces multiple smaller events, creating a central platform to maximise impact and foster synergies across different communication activities.

The discussions in the **breakout groups** focused on five key areas: promoting ESF+ projects, engaging citizens, communicating the future EU budget, enhancing collaboration within the INFORM EU Network, and strengthening cross-border cooperation. In each group,

participants were asked to discuss the challenges, solutions, and concrete next steps for their topic.

1. Promoting ESF+ projects

Challenges include political resistance in some regions, difficulty reaching local communities, sensitive communication around vulnerable groups, and the technical complexity of the ESF+.

Solutions include engaging schools in a non-political way, leveraging Europe Day and local events, organising Brussels visits, strengthening media partnerships, and collaborating with influencers.

Next steps involve increasing communication budgets, improving media cooperation, and ensuring ESF+ project stories are widely shared.

2. Engaging citizens in communication activities

Public disinterest, information overload, lack of knowledge and the complexity of EU funding pose major challenges. Younger generations, in particular, lack awareness of EU funding benefits.

To address this, communicators should develop engaging content strategies, make use of research & testing, encourage more face-to-face interaction, reuse successful campaigns, and create explainer videos featuring past beneficiaries.

Next steps include enhancing cooperation and exchange among Member States and the Commission, expanding training, and ensuring clear contact points within the European Commission for support.

3. Communicating the future EU budget and funds

The EU budget remains abstract for many, and uncertainty about the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) fuels scepticism and fear of big changes. Large figures and technical jargon make communication difficult.

A shift from budget numbers only to impact-focused storytelling is needed. Engaging stakeholders early and ensuring coherent messaging across EU, national, and local levels will help build trust.

Next steps include fostering public debates to discuss the new ideas and address concerns, simplifying messages, and using storytelling to highlight real-world benefits.

4. Strengthening collaboration within the INFORM EU Network

Challenges include capacity constraints, lack of coordination and technical barriers that hinder information-sharing of good examples that can be replicated across countries. Smaller

Member States also face representation issues at meetings. Organising fund-specific meetings in parallel is a challenge for communicators who are in charge of several funds.

What works well for ESF+ are the additional online meetings, INFORM EU training and sharing good practices in plenary meetings. Taking inspiration from the Interact Academy, the training can be expanded to develop a train the trainers' module to also empower project beneficiaries. To encourage networking and ideas sharing, it is important to clarify where to store such information, by whom and when.

Next steps include holding two INFORME EU in-person plenary meetings annually, more ESF+ fund-specific meetings like this one, developing an ideas bank, and improving outreach through joint communication actions.

5. Strengthening collaboration across borders and funds

Coordination between different EU funds is challenging due to internal communication gaps, resource constraints, and inconsistent beneficiary information.

Managing authorities should structure communication better, involve monitoring committees, and tailor messages to different audiences.

Next steps involve integrating cross-fund communication strategies while preserving individual fund identities. The European Commission could encourage managing authorities to work on a structured communication approach across all EU funds.

Conclusion

The INFORM EU Social meeting highlighted the need to strengthen communication on EU funding through better media engagement, structured strategies, enhanced cross-border collaboration and closer cooperation with Commission services. The INFORM EU Network will play a key role in supporting these efforts. Discussions will continue at the next meeting in Tallinn on 16-18 June, focusing on digital democracy and tackling misinformation.