

Poverty in the European Union is a phenomenon that is far from being irrelevant, since 23.5 % of the European population (118 million people) was at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2016. At the same time, this is quite a heterogeneous phenomenon: the country with the highest poverty rate in 2016 was Bulgaria (40.4 %), while the lowest rate was recorded in the Czech Republic (13.3 %). The global economic and financial crisis, which began in 2008, has brought millions of people in the European Union into a state of poverty.

There are some categories of people that are more at risk of poverty and social exclusion than others, such as unemployed people, low educated people, single parents, women, young people, people affected by disability, people born outside UE, people living in the countryside or belonging to an ethnic minority.

Governments can reduce the risk of poverty by investing in social protection, mainly through social transfers: in 2016, social transfers reduced the percentage of people at risk of poverty from 25.9 % to 17.3 % in Europe, but the impact was very different in each member country.

In 2010, the Commission presented a strategy for employment and growth, called Europe 2020 through which it set some important social goals to be achieved by 2020, including reducing the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion by 20 million before 2020.

The European Union is investing a substantial part of its budget available to promote social and economic cohesion among the member states.

In March 2016, the Commission presented a first draft of the Pillar of social rights, a declaration of 20 non-binding principles through which the Commission has sought to protect the social rights of European citizens. At the social summit for employment and growth that took place on 19 November 2017 in Göteborg, the Commission, the European Parliament and the Council jointly proclaimed the European Pillar of Social Rights.

The Commission has planned to monitor the progress made by member states on social rights through the European Semester procedure.

Furthermore, the Commission is endorsing the Pillar proposing a series of guidelines to the Parliament and the Council.