

Update from Aodhán in Brussels - February 2026

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EU anti-poverty report

€20 billion EU funding secured for child poverty in landmark anti-poverty vote.

Earlier this month, the European Parliament backed a landmark report shaping the EU's first-ever Anti-Poverty Strategy. As lead negotiator for the Socialists and Democrats, I am very proud to have secured a major victory for socialists and progressives, with the final report passed at the Plenary full vote of the Parliament in Strasbourg.

The Parliament's position will now directly inform the European Commission's Anti-Poverty Strategy, expected to be unveiled in June ahead of Ireland's EU Council Presidency.

For the first time, the EU is treating poverty with the seriousness it demands. We are finally seeing action that recognises the damage poverty inflicts on individuals, on democracy, and on our political credibility. The report calls for Europe's first-ever Anti-Poverty Strategy to include a dedicated €20 billion budget to combat child poverty. This funding will directly support the most vulnerable children in Ireland by helping guarantee access to education, healthcare and food.

Under Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil, the number of children living in poverty in Ireland has surged by more than 45,000 in just one year. While they celebrate record GDP growth, one in five children cannot afford basic essentials like a winter coat or a new pair of shoes. That is not just failure — it is a scandal born of political neglect.

Now, thanks to the work of the Labour Party and the Socialists and Democrats, Europe is stepping up. Despite strong resistance from the right and far right — who sought to avoid binding commitments and real investment — we secured concrete proposals that confront the structural injustices that trap people in poverty. This includes major European investment to tackle child poverty, action on in-work poverty through decent jobs and fair pay, stronger social protection systems, improved access to quality education, and a call for legislation to prohibit discrimination based on socio-economic background.

The Parliament's vote sends a clear signal ahead of Ireland's EU Presidency: tackling poverty is not charity. It is justice. It is a political choice, and Europe is choosing to act. I want to thank all of my staff for their hard work, with particular thanks to Ciara Murray who led the team on this file.

European Parliament Housing Report

We have reached a decent and workable final draft of the first-ever European Parliament housing report — one that can make a real difference for all Europeans, not only the privileged few.

As a party, we put housing front and centre in our European election campaign, and as promised, working as part of the S&D group, we secured the first European Commissioner for Housing, the European Parliament's special committee on the housing crisis, and Europe's first-ever affordable housing report.

Our mission to reaffirm a home as a right for everyone has been an uphill struggle from the very beginning. Negotiating this report at a time when the EPP is increasingly willing to broker harmful deals with the far right made it a particularly complex challenge. Nevertheless, we have managed to include our main priorities and have produced a draft that gives a voice to our cities, regions, trade unions, and civil society.

As S&D negotiator for the report, I believe its passage in committee was a major step in our efforts for EU-level action on housing. In very tough negotiations, we delivered real progress for people across the EU. If the EU cannot be seen to respond to realities like this, it risks losing the trust of the very people it exists to serve. We wanted to go further, but ambition was repeatedly blocked by Fine Gael's group, the EPP. Housing is the defining social issue of our time, and the S&Ds will continue to lead the fight for a Europe where everyone has a decent, affordable, and sustainable home. With 4,000 homeless children in Dublin, it is my single biggest priority.

Our key gains to defend in the Final Plenary vote are:

1. Short-term rentals

We want to ensure the proliferation of short-term rentals does not threaten affordability, liveability or social stability. Crucially, the report calls for empowering member states, regions and cities to tackle the consequences of short-term rentals.

2. Housing investment

Funding was another key priority for our Group. We secured language calling for increased and dedicated EU funding for housing.

3. Recognition of non-market and non-profit housing models

The report explicitly calls for increasing the supply of cooperative, non-profit and limited-profit housing. We wanted to go further by calling for a special regulatory regime for these actors. However, the compromise breaks with the original market-only logic and anchors housing as a social good, not merely an asset class.

4. Stronger tenants' rights

The initial draft barely mentioned tenants — the only right it addressed was the right to own property. We secured clearer language rebalancing power between tenants and landlords, including calls for greater transparency on rental prices, formalised legal dispute mechanisms, higher standards in the private rental market, and recognition of tenants' unions.

5. Homelessness

Thanks to our work, homelessness is now recognised as the most severe form of poverty and social exclusion. We highlighted child homelessness with a call for accelerated implementation of the European Child Guarantee and national measures to prevent evictions of children at risk. We also secured support for scaling up Housing First initiatives.

6. Protection of vulnerable groups

We strengthened provisions addressing the needs of people with disabilities, young people, and older persons.

7. Speculation and financialisation

Despite heavy resistance from the right, the S&D Group secured a dedicated paragraph on speculation and financialisation. The report calls for an end to abusive practices by private capital in the housing market, measures to tackle speculative vacancy and dereliction, and increased transparency in real estate transactions.

Ukraine — Financial Support

The Labour Party has stood with Ukraine since the start of the conflict, and I was proud to vote for a €90 billion loan package to support the Ukrainian people. At a moment when Ukraine continues to endure relentless aggression, displacement, death and devastation — solidarity from across Europe is not optional. It is a moral imperative.

This support is about standing with a sovereign, democratic people fighting for their survival and giving them the means to defend themselves. It is about protecting civilians, keeping schools open, hospitals functioning and families housed. To turn away at this critical juncture sends the wrong message — both to the people of Ukraine and to those who seek to undermine democracy across Europe. Ireland understands the value of solidarity. We know what it means to seek international support for our own independence. Ireland must stand firmly with Ukraine — not ambiguously, not conditionally, but with conviction.

While no resolution is perfect, and some amendments I voted for were not passed, I felt it was unconscionable to vote against a vital lifeline to the Ukrainian people.

EU Deportation Law

The Parliament approved two separate proposals to change European deportation rules and protections.

As a Labour MEP, I am always ready to work responsibly on reform. But any change must be consistent with our values. These proposals did not meet that test. They are rushed, they allow member states to unilaterally disapply the right to asylum, and they make Europe dependent on foreign governments to manage migration. Europe needs to manage migratory flows, and the Socialists & Democrats group has worked hard over the past decade to deliver common rules. We cannot now support laws that radically undermine fundamental rights.

The first proposal concerned the 'safe third country' concept. The change would allow individual member states to decide, unilaterally, that refugees should be sent elsewhere — and that "elsewhere" can be any country that member state chooses, even if the refugee has no connection to it. In my view, this completely undermines the right to asylum as enshrined in Article 78 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and Article 18 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights. It would amount to a breach of the EU's own primary law by the EU itself.

The intended effect mirrors that of the Rwanda legislation in the UK or Trump's deportations to prisons in El Salvador.

The second proposal was the establishment of a list of safe countries of origin.

An EU list of safe countries of origin is not, in itself, problematic — provided the countries in question are genuinely safe. Unfortunately, candidate countries for EU accession cannot simply be presumed to be safe. Furthermore, the evidence provided in the factsheets of the European Union Asylum Agency does not support some of the proposed designations, and these will likely face serious scrutiny before the Court of Justice of the European Union. The outcome is the designation of 10 new states as “safe” through a process that is questionable at best and will undoubtedly result in unsafe deportations.

Notably, during the entire deliberation process, co-legislators did not discuss — even for a moment — whether any of the newly designated countries are actually safe. Rushing through highly controversial migration reforms is not the way to deliver a just and sustainable migration system.

These proposals have been driven by the far right, with the assistance of Fine Gael's group, the EPP. I voted against.

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