

# **Unveiling the EU policy framing of the Social Economy: an analysis of recent policies and strategies**

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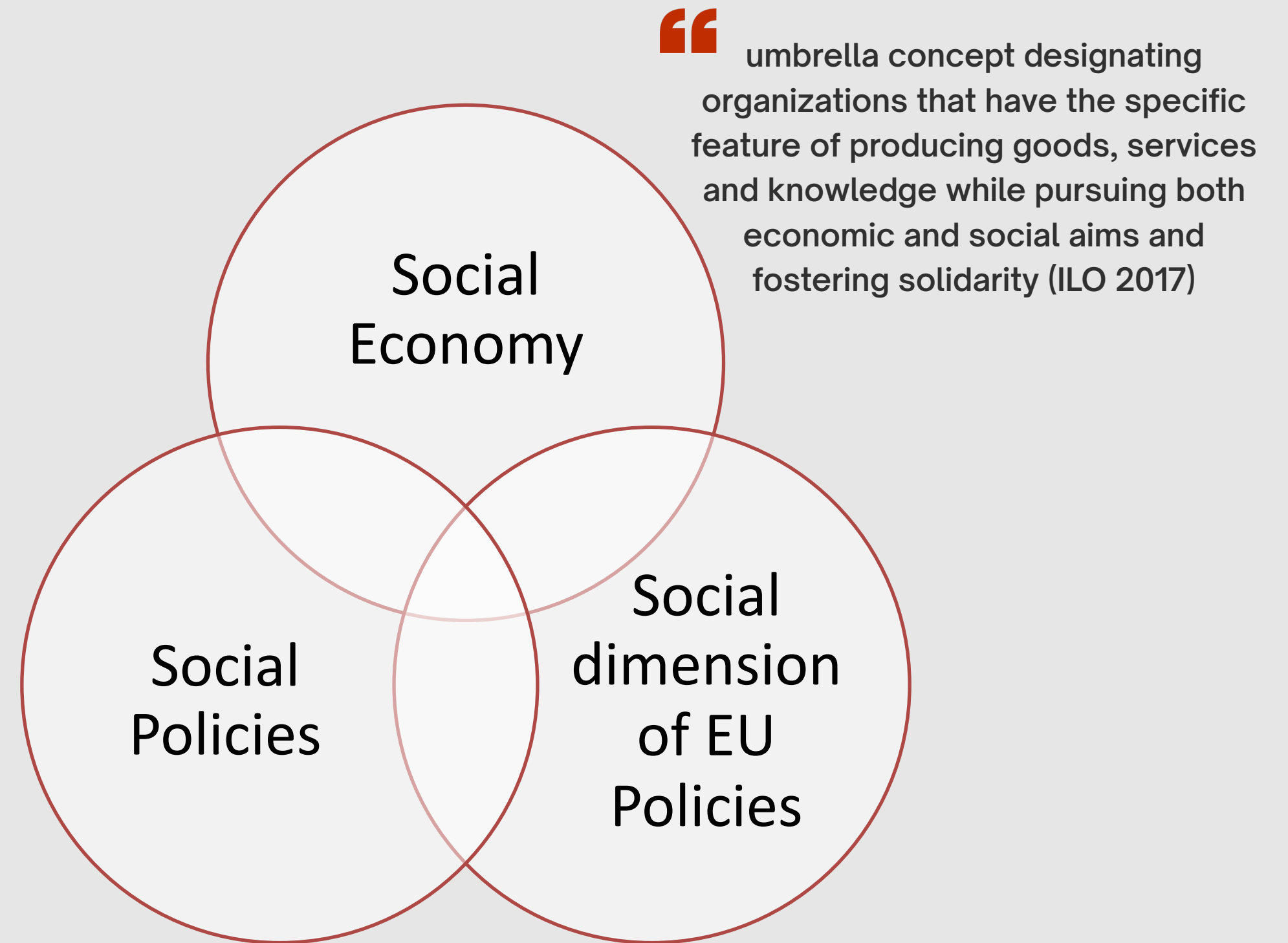
## OUTLINE:



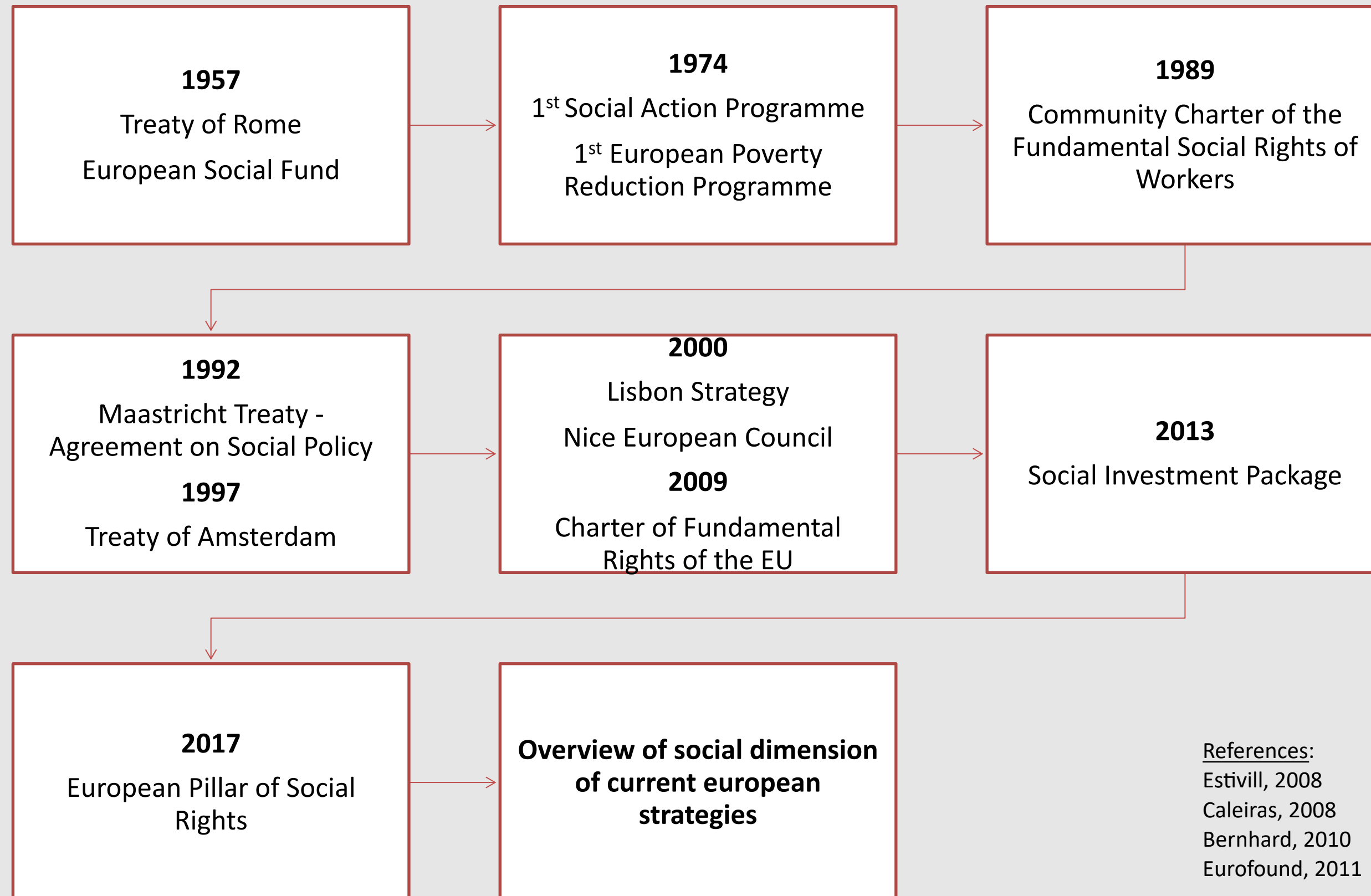
- 1. The Social Dimension of the European Union**  
& the role played by the SE within public policy
- 2. Research Object & Questions**
- 3. Methodology** (text-as-data methods)
- 4. Preliminary Results**
- 5. Discussion**

# 1. The Social Dimension of the European Union

## Main Concepts



# Timeline of the Social Dimension of the EU



References:  
Estivill, 2008  
Caleiras, 2008  
Bernhard, 2010  
Eurofound, 2011

# The Role of European strategies

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## Some trends...

- European integration from the outset has been characterized by an imbalance between social and economic concerns (Estivill, 2008)
- Social policy as a secondary issue, for long reduced to employment strategies
- Europeanization of national social policies associated to the dependence on EU funds, notably in poorer countries (e.g. Caleiras 2008)
- The human capital approach, focused on the individual as entrepreneur, as part of the strategy of European neoliberalism (Bernhard 2010)
- Lack of tools and support mechanisms.

# Social Economy & Public Policy

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- SE has its origins in the attempts of **working classes** to collectively and democratically address their needs from a **perspective of social transformation** (Estivill & Dalmau 2019).
- SE organisations have been active stakeholders in addressing different situations of **vulnerability** faced by different groups - initiatives for the integration of “disadvantaged” or “vulnerable” people (Defourny, Favreau & Laville, 1998) – **complex and multidimensional phenomenon** (Alwang et al 2001)
- Only in the last decades the SE has attracted serious attention in policy circles worldwide and has been recognized for its public policy significance (Tremblay 2012)
- Role played by the SE has received special attention in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic – Porto Social Summit (May 2021)
- Evaluation studies of different EU programmes and pilot schemes have shown that the SE is simultaneously a factor of the fight against unemployment and of integration of those with social difficulties, and generally contributes to **economic and local social development** (Estivill 2008).

## 2. Research Object

- Unveiling the main themes that emerge from EU **strategic orientation documents** and analysing the place of the social economy in such documents
- Analysis of the **main official instruments used for designing such strategy** (resolutions, communications, regulations, directives, recommendations from European Parliament, Council of the EU, European Commission, European Economic and Social Committee), considering **both transversal areas** (like the European Green Deal and the Recovery and Resilience Plan) and those more **specifically related to “employment, social affairs and inclusion”**
- Identifying the **key topics in the social policy agenda setting**

## Research Questions

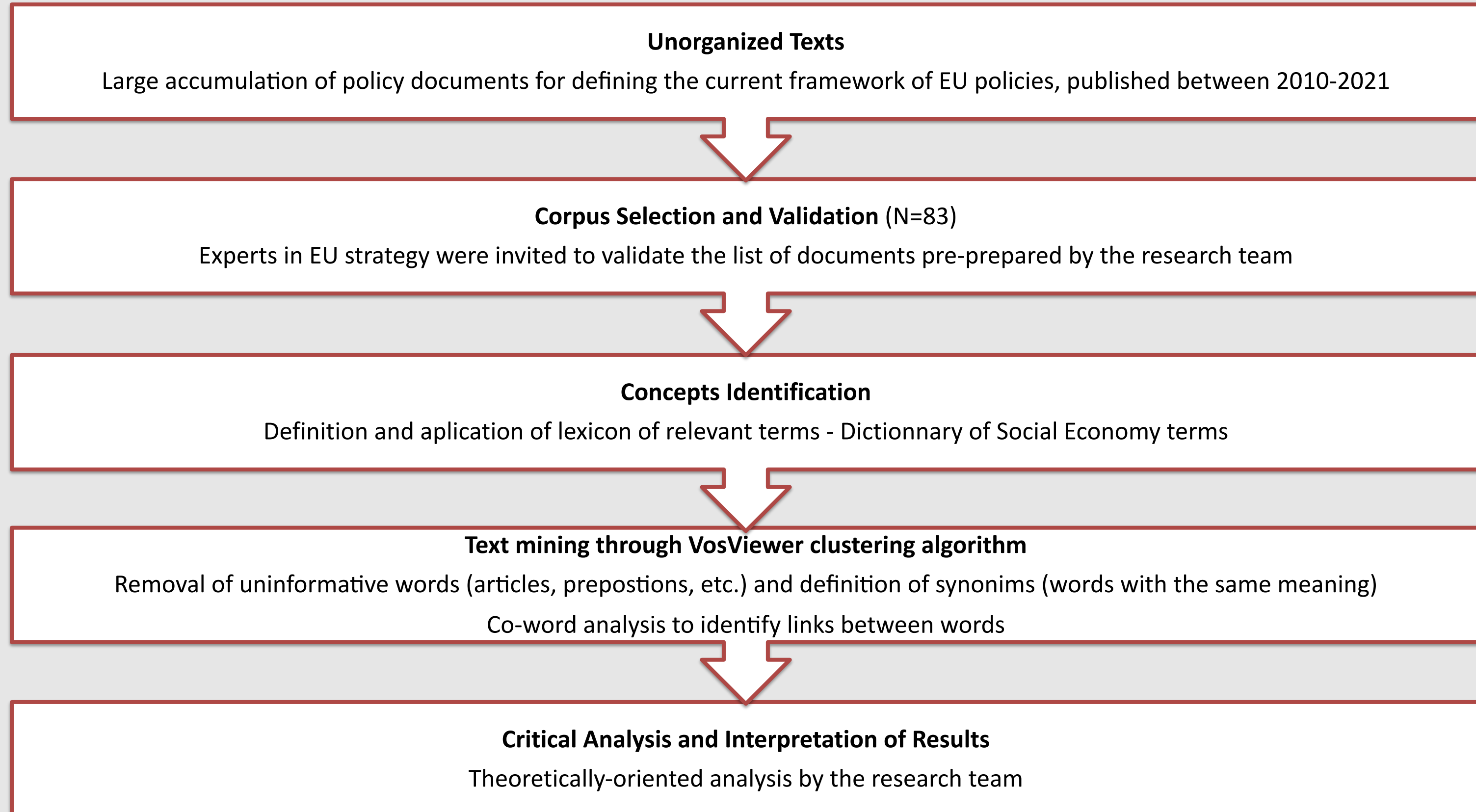
- How are “employment, social affairs and inclusion” EU policy clustered, and which streams are likely to emerge in such EU policy?
- Which strategic streams related to employment, social affairs and inclusion have received the most attention?
- How is the social economy framed?



### Focus on the Policy Content

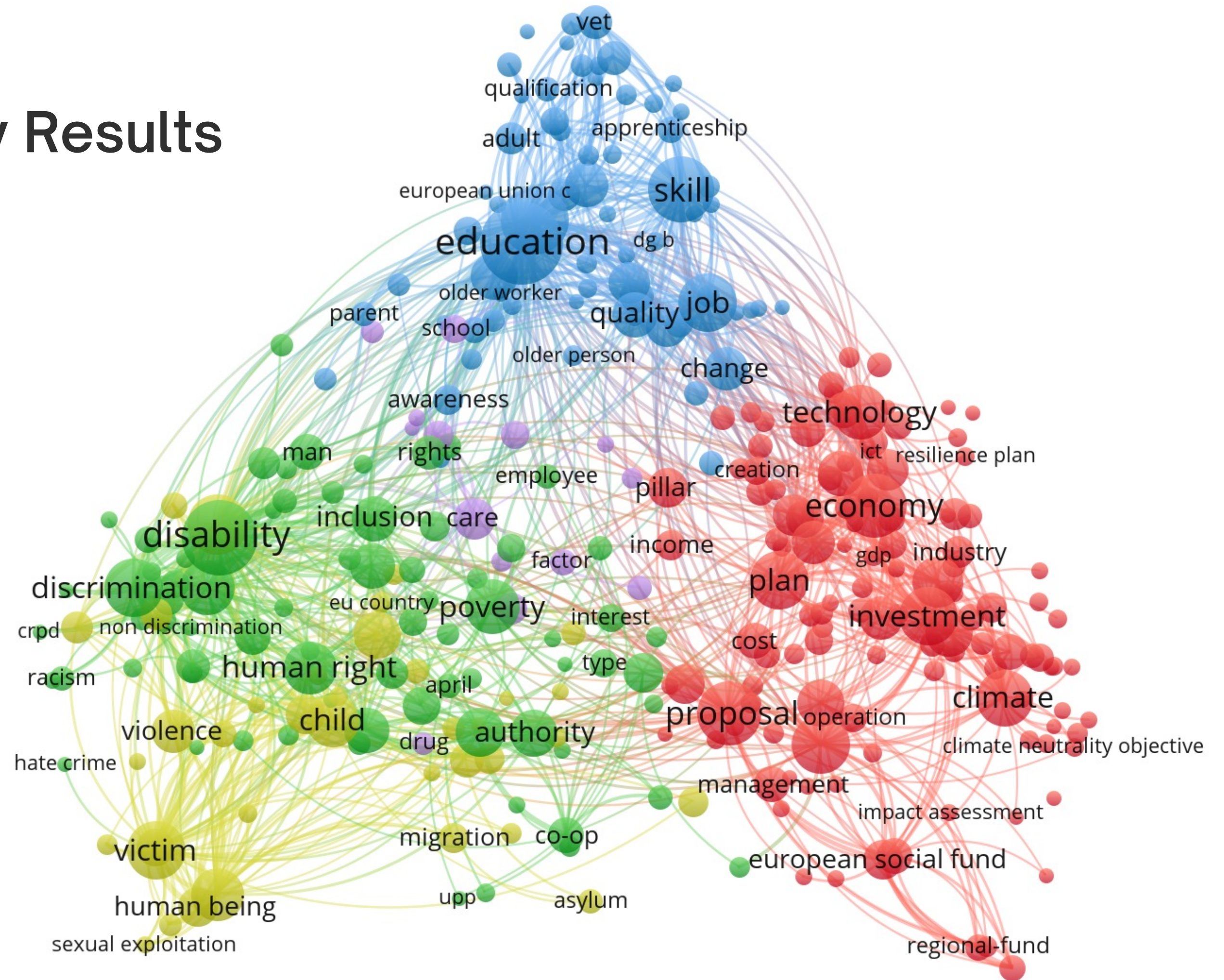
in order to analyse governmental rationalities  
and commitment to action

### 3. Methodology






## 4. Preliminary Results






# 4. Preliminary Results



**How are employment, social affairs and inclusion EU policy clustered, and which streams are likely to emerge in such EU policy?**

- Primary in investment programs / funds for climate transition (technology is a topic) (cluster 1)
- Policies for promoting equality and non-discrimination stand out, for ensuring inclusion of those from an economic and social perspective
- An effort has been made for increasing skills of workers, through education and training for improving competences (particular focus on young people)
- Integration and support of people in vulnerable situations and victims of human trafficking (focus on woman and child)
- Policies for promoting health care focused on mental health, namely policies for dealing with drug phenomenon

# 4. Preliminary Results



**Which strategic streams related to employment, social affairs and inclusion have received the most attention?**

- Climate change as a long-term concern /sustainability
- Continuous training/improvement of workers
- Health care promotion, specially for the group of people with substance abuse
- Cooperation between member states stands to make the EU strategy in practice, more than a comprehensive social policy

# 4. Preliminary Results




**How is the social economy framed?**

***As provider of social services; as an employer; as social innovator and entrepreneur:***

- Social economy terms mainly present in policy documents refer to “social enterprise”, “social innovation” and “cooperatives” [co-op]
- Social Innovation appears, associated with entrepreneurship, as key tools for combatting unemployment
- New legal form of “European Cooperative Society” has space in EU policies, aiming to facilitate cross-border and transnational activities

**SE tends to be absent when it comes to economic, technological, innovation, environmental issues, and it lacks operational mechanisms and tools**

## 4. Discussion

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- Gap analysis: why aren't other organizations of the wide spectrum of SEO present?
  - Despite the increasing complexity of today's social issues there is a continuity in EU social policy, and not a break with the past.
  - Whereas vulnerability and social policy in general are theoretically defined as complex and multidimensional phenomena, there is still a lack of integrated policies and strategies
  - Need for a transversal approach to the social sphere, that recognizes and integrates various strategies - economy, employment, health, education, culture, technology, environment, mobility, housing, etc. (the Barcelona-Catalunya example)
  - Short-term financing, in the form of projects, also makes continued work and structural change difficult
  - Despite some concrete achievements and the growing acknowledgment of the importance of the social dimension of the EU, there is still a lack of commitment, tools and competences for its effective implementation and for advancing further.

# Thank You

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