

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

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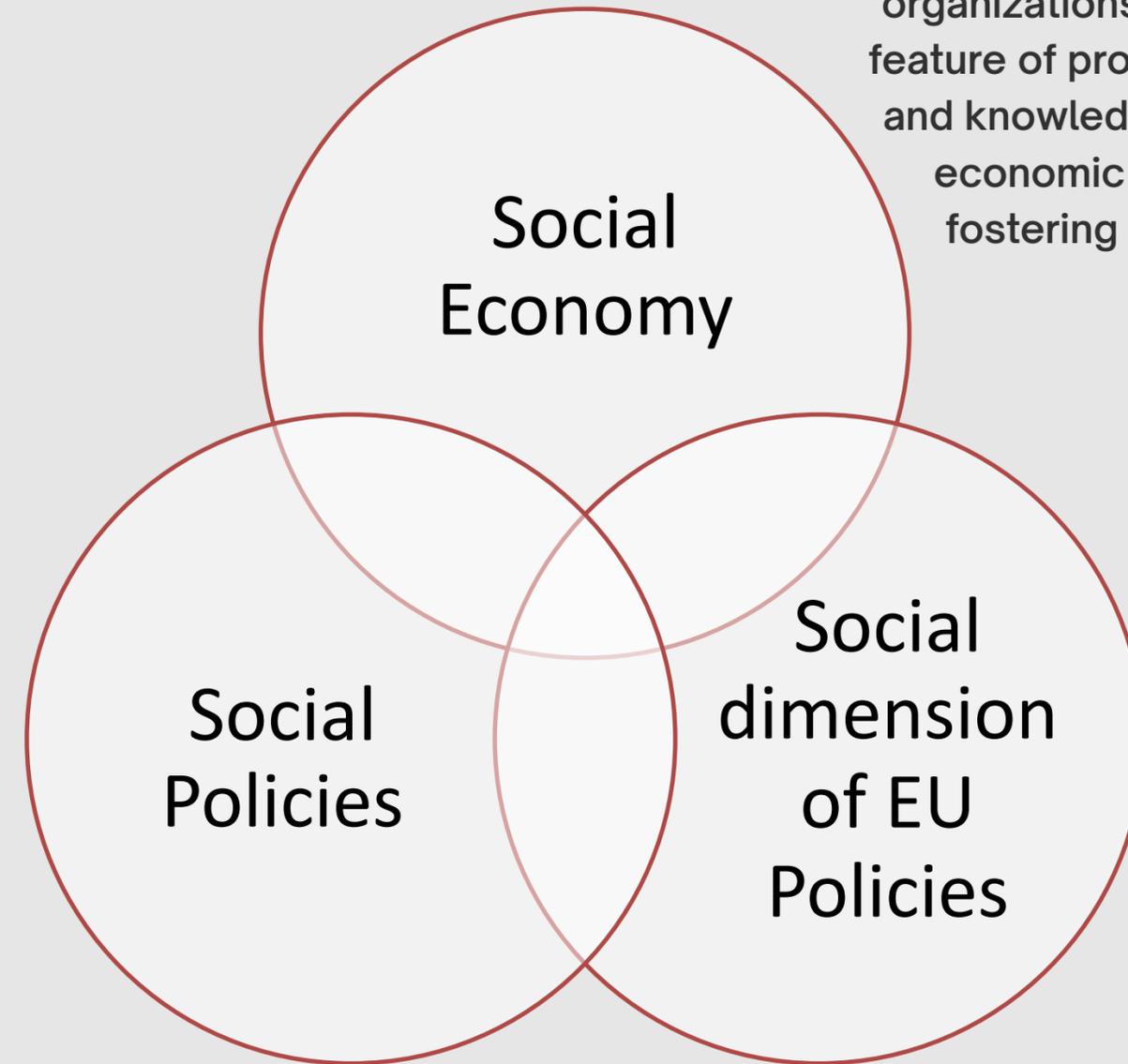
## OUTLINE:



- 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**

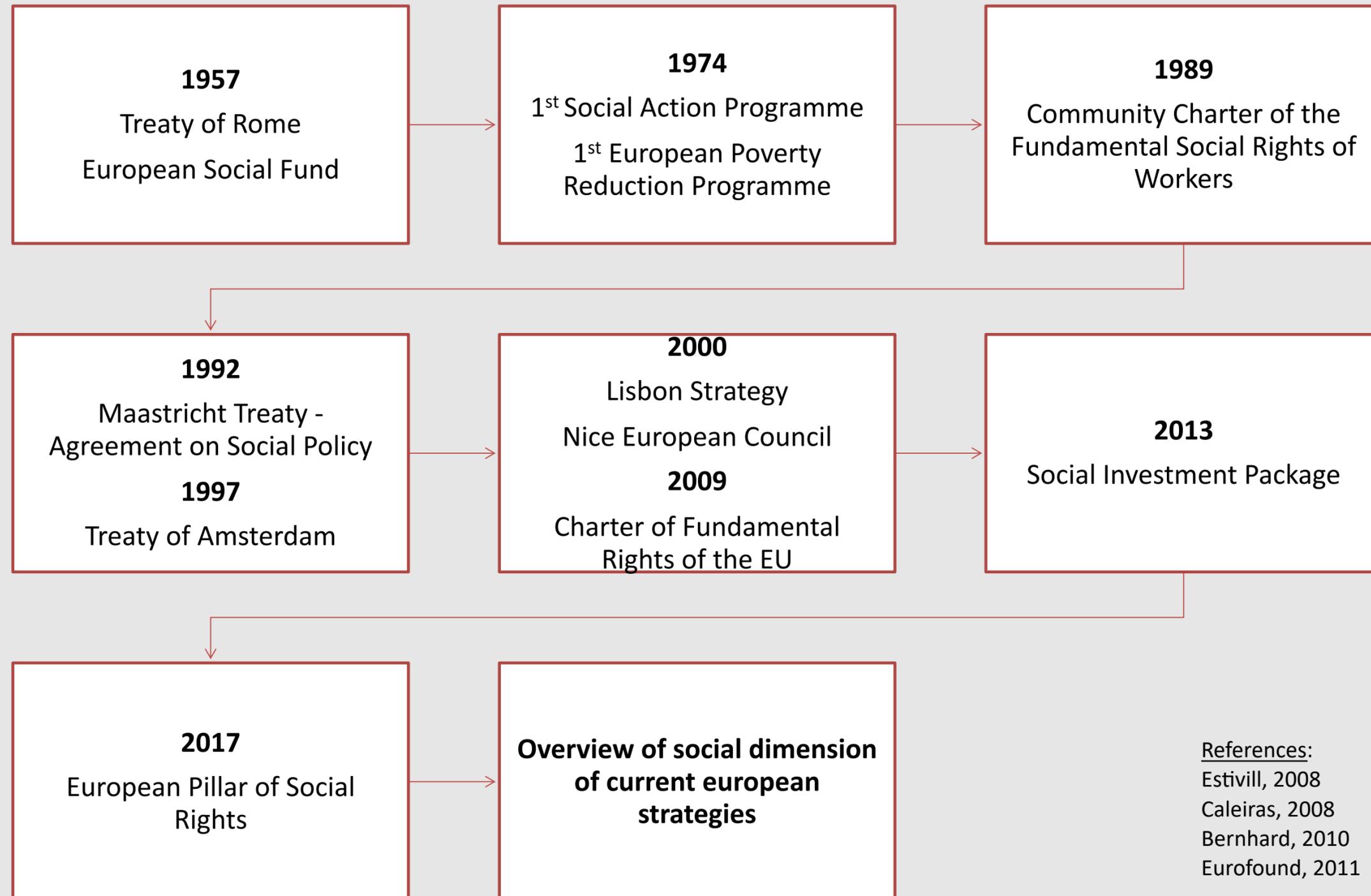
# 1. The Social Dimension of the European Union

## Main Concepts



“ umbrella concept designating organizations that have the specific feature of producing goods, services and knowledge while pursuing both economic and social aims and fostering solidarity (ILO 2017)

# Timeline of the Social Dimension of the EU



# 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 & Lavielle, 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

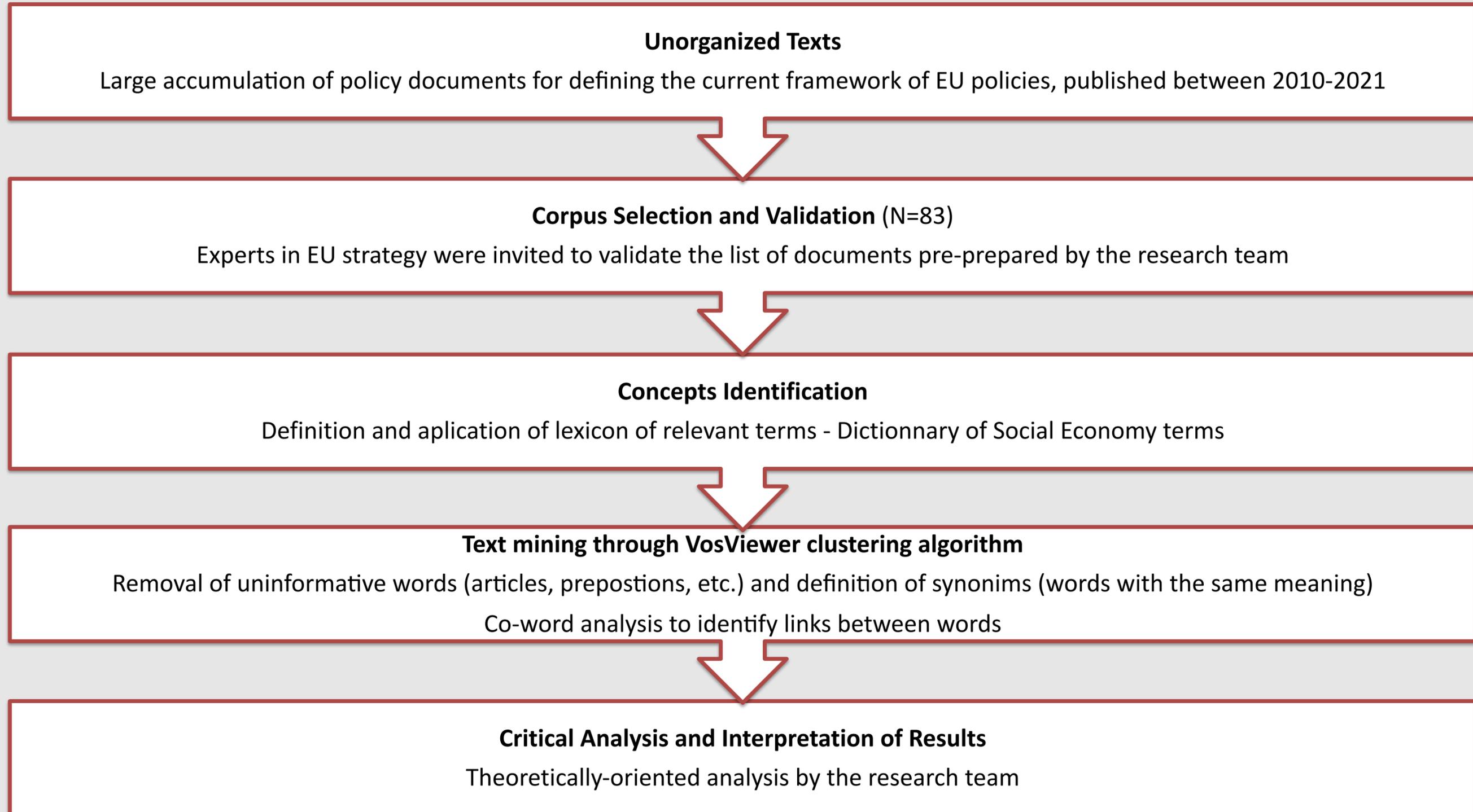
- How are “employment, social affairs and inclusion” EU policy clustered, and which streams are likely to emerge in such EU policy?
- Which strategic streams related to employment, social affairs and inclusion have received the most attention?
- How is the social economy framed?



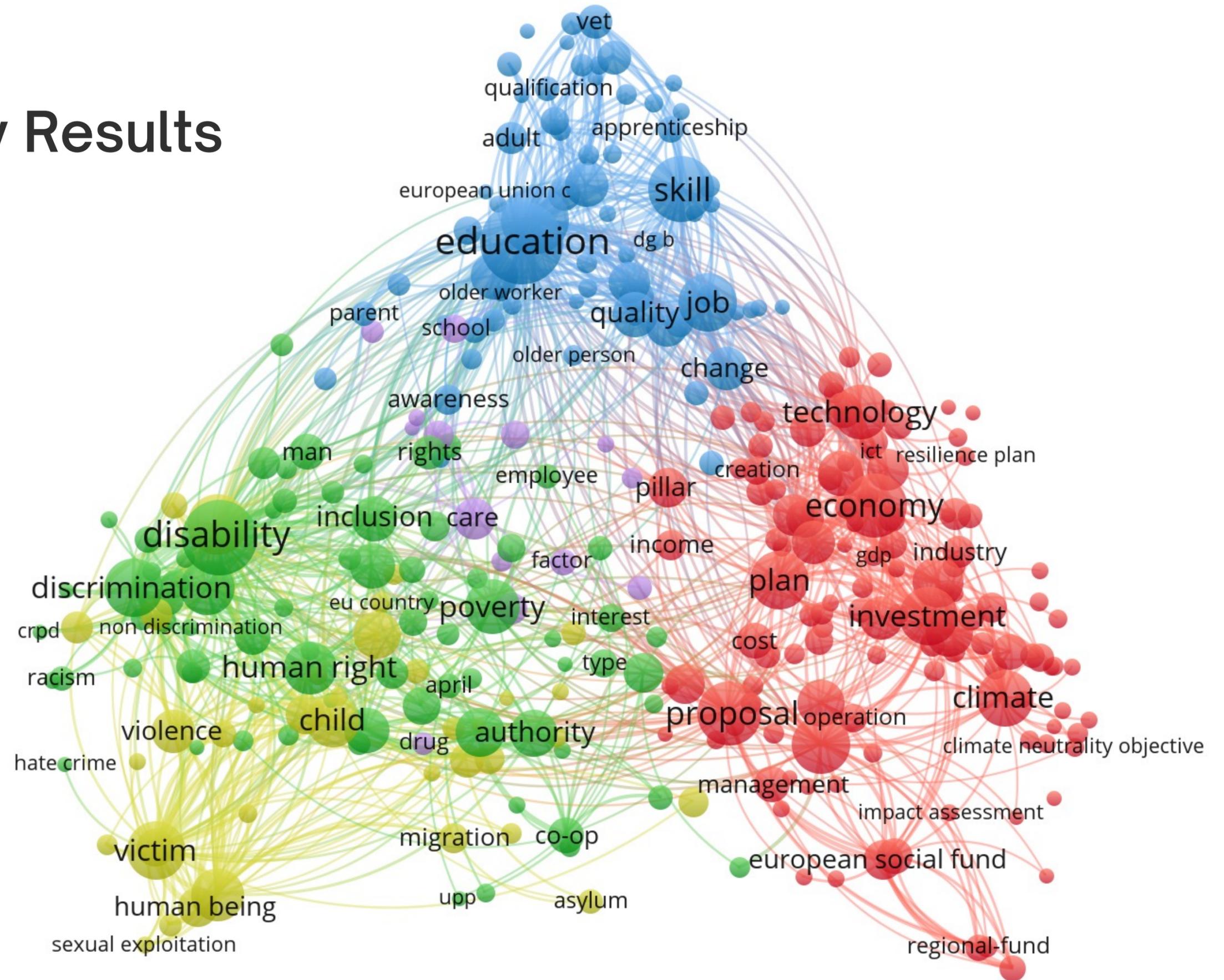
### Focus on the Policy Content

in order to analyse governmental rationalities and commitment to action

# 3. Methodology



# 4. Preliminary Results



# 4. Preliminary Results

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## **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

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## 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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