



*Employers entrusted to deliver
Sustainability Growth Innovation*

Policy Kit

with regard to the Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU

1 July 2026 – 31 December 2026

SGI Europe has represented employers and enterprises providing services of general interest since 1961. Our members are organisations and enterprises active in fields such as:

- Central & local administrations,
- Healthcare,
- Social services,
- Education,
- Housing,
- Waste management,
- Energy,
- Transport,
- Water,
- Environment,
- Postal services,
- Public service media,
- Telecommunications.

Modern public services and services of general interest (SGIs) support the fundamental goals of the EU, enabling business, cohesion, economic and social solidarity, and a better quality of life for citizens.

Introduction

Services of general interest as the delivery infrastructure for competitiveness, values and security

SGI Europe welcomes the programme of the Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union and its focus on competitiveness, values and security. These three priorities are closely connected. Europe cannot be competitive without strong territorial foundations, accessible services, quality jobs, and reliable infrastructure. It cannot uphold its values if citizens and communities lack effective access to decent housing, care, education, energy, water, transport, healthcare, social services, and digital connectivity. It cannot be secure without resilient infrastructure, prepared communities, and the capacity to maintain vital societal functions in times of crisis.

We see services of general interest as the crosscutting element underpinning the delivery of those three priorities. They are part of Europe's delivery infrastructure, and enable productivity, inclusion, cohesion, climate adaptation, preparedness, territorial attractiveness, and the Freedom to Stay.

The Irish Presidency comes at a decisive moment. The negotiations on the 2028-2034 Multiannual Financial Framework, the implementation of the One Europe, One Market Roadmap, the Better Regulation and Simplification agenda, the Quality Jobs Act, the Preparedness Union Strategy, the consolidation of the Energy Union, the circular economy and water resilience agendas, as well as the European Affordable Housing Plan, will shape Europe's capacity to deliver for citizens and enterprises.

SGI Europe calls on the Irish Presidency to ensure that services of general interest are recognised as essential to the delivery of Europe's competitiveness, values and security agenda.

Competitiveness: Investing in Europe's territorial foundations

The Irish Presidency places competitiveness at the centre of its programme. For SGI Europe, EU competitiveness depends equally on industrial performance, market integration, innovation, and regulatory simplification as on the services and infrastructure that enable people, enterprises, and territories to thrive.

Energy networks, transport systems, healthcare, education, social services, affordable housing, water and wastewater services, waste management, postal services and digital connectivity are enabling conditions for productivity, investment and territorial attractiveness. Without them, enterprises face higher costs, workers face barriers to mobility and participation, and the competitiveness of EU regions falls behind.

The EU needs to embrace a broader understanding of competitiveness: it should encompass more than companies' ability to compete on the global stage. It should integrate its prerequisites and be linked to long-term investment, quality employment, affordability, resilience, innovation, territorial cohesion and access to essential services. A competitiveness agenda that does not address these foundations will remain incomplete.

Digitalisation and AI should be treated as tools to strengthen the accessibility, resilience and quality of SGIs, while ensuring that investment, skills, social dialogue and safeguards for rights, data protection and working conditions support their deployment.

The implementation of the "One Europe, One Market Roadmap" must better integrate those elements. A deeper Single Market can bring benefits, but it must also respect the diversity of national, regional and local models for organising SGIs. Market integration should not undermine missions of general interest, universal access, affordability, quality or continuity of service.

Key messages for the Irish Presidency

SGI Europe calls on the Irish Presidency to:

- Recognise SGIs as strategic assets for Europe's competitiveness, resilience and cohesion.
- Ensure that the completion of the Single Market supports the capacity of SGI providers to deliver accessible, affordable and high-quality services.
- Promote a level playing field that values quality, continuity, affordability, investment and public-interest missions.
- Ensure that simplification leads to better regulation and does not put in jeopardy key EU policy ambitions.
- Support social investment as a driver of productivity, labour market participation and long-term prosperity.
- Ensure that Europe's AI agenda supports the delivery of SGIs, by promoting trustworthy and human-centred AI, investment in critical and digital infrastructure for accessible and affordable services of general interest, energy and water security measures, skills development, social dialogue and practical safeguards for service quality, accessibility, data protection and workers.
- Advance public procurement as a strategic tool to support quality services, resilience, innovation and sustainability, while respecting subsidiarity and the capacity of public authorities to define procurement requirements in line with local needs.
- Ensure that the completion of the Single Market strengthens the Freedom to Stay by supporting access to essential services, affordable housing, infrastructure and quality jobs in all territories.
- Promote more predictable and evidence-based law-making through the Better Regulation agenda and adopt EU rules which are clearer, more coherent and easier to implement.

Values: Turning European principles into access, inclusion and quality jobs

The Irish Presidency places strong emphasis on European values, including equality, social inclusion, non-discrimination, the rule of law, gender equality, the rights of persons with disabilities, child wellbeing and poverty reduction. For SGI Europe, delivering on these values requires effective access to childcare, education, healthcare, care, housing, mobility, energy and digital connectivity, as well as action to address territorial gaps, affordability barriers and workforce shortages. This is essential to strengthen cohesion and ensure that all citizens can benefit from Europe's social and economic model.

This is also where the Freedom to Stay – as defined by Enrico Letta in his report “Much More than a Market” – becomes central. People cannot remain in, return to, or build a future in a territory if they lack access to SGIs or other essential services. The Freedom to Stay therefore must bring concrete meaning to the Irish Presidency's focus on cohesion, inclusion and balanced territorial development.

In particular, affordable housing should be a key priority in this context. Housing is more than a social issue. It is an essential pre-condition for territorial cohesion, labour market participation, demographic resilience, and competitiveness. Where housing is unaffordable or unavailable, workers cannot access jobs, young people cannot build independent lives, essential workers cannot remain in the communities they serve, and territories lose attractiveness.

Finally, promoting quality jobs will be equally central. SGI providers are major employers across Europe and face recruitment and retention challenges, demographic pressures, skills shortages, and growing demands linked to the green and digital transitions. Without sufficient skilled workers, Europe will not be able to deliver accessible healthcare, education, care, transport, energy, water, housing, digital services or other SGIs.

Key messages for the Irish Presidency

SGI Europe calls on the Irish Presidency to:

- Promote social dialogue as a key tool to anticipate labour market change, manage transitions and improve working conditions.
- Address recruitment and retention challenges in SGI sectors through skills strategies, lifelong learning, workforce planning and investment in decent working conditions.
- Ensure that the Quality Jobs agenda reflects the specific workforce needs of SGI providers.
- Promote occupational safety and health as a core element of quality jobs and organisational resilience.
- Ensure that fair labour mobility supports legal certainty, decent work, equal treatment and effective enforcement, without creating disproportionate administrative burdens.
- Connect the European Anti-Poverty Strategy and the Child Guarantee with effective access to housing, care, healthcare, education, energy, mobility and digital services.
- Support the inclusion of persons with disabilities through accessible services, employment opportunities and assistive technologies.
- Approach affordable and social housing as a service of general interest, supported by long-term investment and safeguards against speculation.
- Promote integration policies that combine decent work, skills recognition, language support, housing, education, healthcare and social services.

Security: strengthening resilience through SGIs, critical infrastructure and preparedness

The Irish Presidency's focus on security is highly relevant to SGI Europe, especially because the programme addresses security broadly, including preparedness, critical infrastructure, cybersecurity, energy security, environmental security, health security, and resilience.

Recent crises have shown that SGIs are on the front lines of resilience. Energy systems, water supply, transport, healthcare, waste management, housing, postal services, digital networks, education and social services are essential to prevent crises, absorb shocks and maintain social and economic continuity.

The EU preparedness and resilience cannot be limited to defence, emergency response or crisis coordination. It must include the resilience of daily services, workers, communities, infrastructure, supply chains and territories. It must be designed and shaped by the actors who operate essential services daily. SGI providers and social partners should therefore be structurally involved in preparedness planning, risk assessment, crisis response mechanisms and resilience strategies.

This is also relevant for the protection of critical infrastructure, cybersecurity, energy infrastructure, transport networks, ports, water systems and healthcare systems. Resilience requires investment, long-term planning, workforce capacity and clear governance. It also requires coordination across all levels of government – from the EU to the very local – and between public authorities, SGI providers, social partners and civil society.

Digital sovereignty should also be understood as a core dimension of resilience and preparedness. The expansion of Europe's cloud, AI and data infrastructure must be built on Preparedness by Design, integrating structural resilience, cybersecurity, resource efficiency and long-term planning. Digital infrastructure should not be treated in isolation from physical utilities, as it depends, among other things, on energy supply and water availability. A sovereign and resilient digital ecosystem is essential to ensure service continuity, protect sensitive public-interest data and reduce strategic dependencies.

Climate adaptation, water resilience, and the circular economy should also be viewed through the lens of security, resilience, and sovereignty. Water, energy, waste, housing, transport and health systems are increasingly exposed to climate-related risks. Strengthening their resilience is essential to protect citizens, ensure continuity of services and avoid higher long-term costs.

Key messages for the Irish Presidency

SGI Europe calls on the Irish Presidency to:

- Ensure that the implementation of the Preparedness Union Strategy fully recognises SGIs as vital societal functions.
- Involve SGI providers and social partners in EU and national preparedness planning.
- Ensure that risk assessments take into account the operational realities of service delivery.
- Support investment in the resilience of SGI infrastructure.
- Link preparedness to workforce planning, OSH, training and continuity of operations.
- Recognise the role of local and regional levels, where many SGIs are organised and delivered.
- Ensure that cybersecurity, critical infrastructure and crisis preparedness rules are coherent, proportionate and workable.
- Support stronger coordination between preparedness, climate adaptation, health security, energy security and territorial cohesion.
- Treat digital sovereignty as a preparedness priority, ensuring that Europe's cloud, AI and data infrastructure is resilient, secure, resource-efficient and integrated with essential utilities.
- Recognise circular SGI infrastructure as a core element of Europe's resilience, by supporting investment, technology neutrality, secondary raw materials, waste prevention and recovery, and resilient circular systems across water, waste, energy, transport, postal and digital services.

The MFF as the cross-cutting delivery tool

The 2028-2034 Multiannual Financial Framework will be the main cross-cutting instrument for delivering on Europe's competitiveness, cohesion and resilience. SGI Europe welcomes the ambition to align the EU's long-term investment strategy with these objectives. Still, it stresses that the success of the next MFF will depend on how its new instruments and governance structures reflect realities on the ground.

The next EU budget must provide stable and predictable investment in the services and infrastructure that make Europe's strategic priorities deliverable: water, energy, healthcare, housing, transport, waste management, media, education, digital infrastructure, and other services of general interest. These sectors are essential to Europe's preparedness, territorial cohesion, social inclusion and long-term competitiveness.

SGI Europe stresses that the European Competitiveness Fund must remain focused on genuine EU added value, including projects with cross-border spillovers, collective security benefits, strategic autonomy, long-term returns, and positive effects on territorial cohesion. Its governance should be transparent and based on objective criteria, with the involvement of social partners, local and regional authorities and SGI providers.

The new NRRPs may help streamline EU funding, but they must not lead to the recentralisation of decision-making. The next MFF must safeguard the partnership principle, shared management, territorial chapters and meaningful stakeholder participation throughout planning, implementation and evaluation. EU investment must remain grounded in local realities and Europe's territorial diversity.

SGI Europe also underlines that preparedness must be better embedded in the design of the next MFF. Recent crises have shown that SGIs are vital societal functions and Europe's first line of resilience. The MFF should therefore support cross-border prevention, civil protection, critical infrastructure protection, digital resilience, climate adaptation, water security and emergency preparedness.

The link between EU funding and the Semester can strengthen long-term planning and accountability, but only if it respects subsidiarity, social dialogue and the autonomy of national systems. Performance frameworks should remain realistic, outcome-based and proportionate, avoiding excessive conditionality, frequent policy shifts or administrative burdens for smaller organisations and local service providers.

Key messages for the Irish Presidency

SGI Europe calls on the Irish Presidency to:

- Support an ambitious MFF that reflects the scale of Europe's long-term investment needs in competitiveness, cohesion, preparedness and resilience.
- Ensure that a clear understanding of European added value, including cross-border benefits, collective security, strategic autonomy and social and territorial cohesion, guides EU funds.
- Preserve a strong cohesion policy focused on reducing disparities between and within regions and supporting balanced territorial development.
- Safeguard the partnership principle in the National and Regional Partnership Plans, ensuring the meaningful involvement of local and regional authorities, social partners and SGI providers.
- Prevent the recentralisation of EU funding decisions by maintaining shared management, territorial chapters, measurable regional targets and transparent governance.
- Ensure that the European Competitiveness Fund complements other EU funds and supports projects that deliver long-term productivity, resilience and cohesion benefits.
- Embed preparedness by design in the next MFF, with stable and predictable funding for vital societal functions and critical SGI infrastructure.
- Ensure that new own resources do not undermine the affordability of SGIs, including through full impact assessments and appropriate safeguards for public SMEs and SGI providers.
- Link the MFF and the European Semester carefully, preserving subsidiarity, long-term planning, proportionality in reporting and the involvement of social partners and regional authorities.

Conclusion

The Irish Presidency's priorities of competitiveness, values and security provide a strong framework for action. SGI Europe believes that SGIs are the bridge between these three objectives.

They enable competitiveness by providing the infrastructure, services, and workforce that enterprises and territories need. They make values tangible by ensuring access, inclusion, equality and cohesion. They make security real by sustaining critical infrastructure, preparedness and community resilience.

SGI Europe therefore calls on the Irish Presidency to place SGIs at the centre of the EU's delivery agenda. The Union's next political and financial cycle must be built on the recognition that Europe's strength depends not only on strategic ambition, but on the capacity to deliver in every territory, for every citizen and for every community.