

RESPONSE TO THE REFLECTION PAPER ON THE FUTURE OF EU FINANCES

EUROPEAN EXPERT GROUP ON THE TRANSITION FROM INSTITUTIONAL TO COMMUNITY-BASED CARE

The European Expert Group on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care (EEG)¹ has prepared this response to the [reflection paper on the future of the finances of the European Union \(EU\)](#) to ensure that the Post-2020 EU Budget continues to provide opportunities to improve the lives of over one million adults and children still living in long-stay residential institutions across Europe. There is a strong need for investment in the deinstitutionalisation process and for the transformation towards innovative, person-centred family- and community-based support, health and housing services.²

EU COHESION POLICY TRANSFORMS LIVES

The EU prioritised deinstitutionalisation during the last Multi-annual Financial Framework through a Cohesion Policy which aims, among other things, to lift people out of poverty and social exclusion. The new Regulations introduced the [ex-ante conditionalities](#) to help ensuring that EU funds support the transition from institutional to community-based services. This is a good example of how the EU can make a real difference in the lives of

¹ The EEG is a broad coalition of organisations representing people with care or support needs (including children, persons with disabilities, the homeless and people experiencing mental health problems) and their families, as well as service providers, public authorities and intergovernmental organisations. For more information see: <https://deinstitutionalisation.com>

² Wherever possible, the EEG avoids using the term ‘deinstitutionalisation’, since it is often understood as simply the closure of institutions. In places where the term is used, it refers to the process of developing a range of services in the community, including prevention, education and employment, in order to eliminate the need for institutional care. UNICEF defines deinstitutionalisation as “the full process of planning transformation, downsizing and/or closure of residential institutions, while establishing a diversity of other child care services regulated by rights-based and outcomes-oriented standards.”

people who are among the most socially excluded (including persons with disabilities, older persons, the homeless, children and families) and help them to realise their human rights. For example, in some Member States, children and adults with disabilities were helped to leave institutions through the use of the European Structural and Investment Funds, which financed the development of community-based alternatives. Thanks to these funds, some of the children who were previously housed in institutions and orphanages, were supported to return to their families or placed in family-based care; or were supported to access education, all of which allowed them to develop to their full potential. Similarly, Member States such as Bulgaria, Romania and Latvia have been supported to reform their child protection systems, allowing children to grow up in family and community-based care. Cohesion Policy made it possible to begin these important reforms even during the financial crisis when austerity measures led to serious cuts in the social protection systems across Europe and when national resources for innovative changes were limited.

MORE TO DO – COHESION POLICY AS A DRIVER FOR REFORM!

The EEG notes that the use of Cohesion Policy to invest in deinstitutionalisation is, at present, limited to twelve Member States.³ This is despite the fact that institutionalisation is still a very real concern in many other Member States (i.e. Belgium, Germany and France). The EEG strongly encourages the EU to assume a leading role in social issues by renewing and increasing the Cohesion Policy budget in the next Multi-annual Financial Framework and invest in deinstitutionalisation in all EU Member States, including those who were previously not included. We want to ensure that Cohesion Policy continues to contribute to the deinstitutionalisation of thousands of adults and children and is not spent in ways that violate their human rights.

Moreover, the reflection paper notes that there are significant barriers to the uptake and efficient use of the funds. While reforms have taken place to simplify the process of applying for funding, much more needs to be done to ensure that EU funds are also accessible to organisations with limited administrative capacity, are transparent, sustainable, and more efficiently monitored, and the Partnership Principle is fully implemented in all Member States.

Considering the great potential that EU Cohesion Policy has in changing lives and supporting the transition from institutions to high-quality community-based services that promote social inclusion, we believe the EU can do even more to support this process.

³ The European Commission established “identified needs” (Criteria 5) in twelve Member States: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia and Croatia.

The EEG is calling for:

#1

Further investment into Cohesion Policy, which takes into account the need to facilitate the transition from institutional to community-based care and make the social, health and housing sector, as well as the education system and the labour market, more inclusive. Any of the five scenarios on the future of the European Union as outlined in the White paper, even those focusing on doing less, must include Cohesion Policy as a central element.

#2

Strengthening, extending, and ensuring the efficient monitoring of the ex-ante conditionalities on the transition from institutions to community based care and services to guarantee that:

- All EU Member States, not only those with identified needs, can use cohesion funds for the transition process.
- Ex-ante conditionalities on the transition from institutional to community-based care are also applied to external funding invested outside the EU.
- Ex-ante conditionalities are monitored and revised throughout the implementation of the funds through the development of specific instruments and mechanisms.

#3

Reform and simplification of the funding processes to ensure that:

- Funds are rigorously **monitored** and are used **in line with the Charter of Fundamental Rights and international human rights standards**, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) ratified by the EU and 27 of its Member States.
- The process is more **transparent** and there is an efficient **complaints system** in place in all Member States.
- **Civil society organisations** are provided with the necessary capacity building and funding, in order to be able to participate in all the stages of the use of EU funds, in line with the Partnership Principle.
- **The Partnership Principle is strengthened** and guaranteed through an ex-ante conditionality which ensures the meaningful involvement of civil society in the planning, implementation and monitoring of the spending of EU funding.

- The preparation of the Partnership Agreements and Operational Programmes is inclusive and the partners, including civil society organisations, are consulted at all stages.
- The advisory role of European Commission in Monitoring Committees is clarified and, if necessary, strengthened.
- The duration of the next Multi-annual Financial Framework should not be reduced from seven to five years as mentioned as an option in the reflection paper. This would hinder the development of long-term policies such as Cohesion Policy.

September 2017

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