



Reaction to the European Pillar of Social Rights

Action Plan

European Expert Group on the Transition from institutional to Community-based Care

What is the EEG?

The [European Expert Group on the Transition from Institutional to Community-Based Care \(EEG\)](#) is a coalition representing children and their families, people with disabilities and their families, homeless people, people experiencing mental health problems, service providers, public authorities and UN organisations. The EEG members come together because we believe the segregation and institutionalisation of all people must end.

Institutional care refers to any residential care where residents are isolated from the broader community and/or compelled to live together. Residents do not have enough control over their lives and over decisions that affect them. Requirements of the organisation itself tend to take precedence over the residents' individual's choice, preferences and support needs.

Both the EU and all Member States are bound by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) which ensures the equal right of all persons with disabilities to live in the community. It is estimated, however, that over one million people in the EU currently live in institutions.

An Action Plan that offers some progress in bringing people out of institutional care, but could do more

A strong Social Europe

Four years after the release of the European Pillar of Social Rights, the EEG welcomes the Action Plan that aims to navigate its implementation by 2025. The Action Plan also provides three headline targets, clear timelines for implementing the proposed actions, a revised social scoreboard and a link to EU funds.

However, out of the 20 principles, **principle number three, 'Equal opportunities'** stands out. The Action Plan states: "*Europeans value this unique social and*

*economic model and expect it to bring **opportunities for all, irrespective of sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.** The Union's ambition is to make good on the promise of shared prosperity. This is also the promise of the European Pillar of Social Rights proclaimed by the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission in 2017".*

We regret to see that the Action Plan does not include any reference to the continuation of **deinstitutionalisation**. Given that more than 1,4 million people¹ still live in institutions, the EEG calls for the continuation of the processes of transition from institutional to family and community-based care. The only link to deinstitutionalisation is via the **new Strategy on the rights of persons with disabilities** for the period 2021—2030.

We welcome the three **EU headline targets** for 2030 that are aligned with Sustainable Development Goals targets:

- ✓ **At least 78% of the population aged 20 to 64 should be in employment by 2030**

As we know, employment helps people to live fuller and more independent lives. Therefore, the EEG welcomes the specific reference to the fact that other under-represented groups (including persons with disabilities) who are particularly at risk of exclusion or discrimination, will be able to participate in the labour market to the maximum of their capacity. The commitment is particularly relevant considering that only 50,8% of persons with disabilities are in employment compared to 75% without disabilities.

In addition, the EU commits to increasing the provision of formal early childhood education and care (ECEC). However, a very strong commitment to the provision of other services, such as respite care and personal assistance services, is equally important and necessary to further support the reconciliation of work and family life.

- ✓ **At least 60% of all adults should participate in training every year**

Transition from institutional to community-based care requires also re-training of staff, helping them to achieve new skills and improve their capacity to support inclusion (and as by product improving their employability). The process also involves education and training of the care residents.

Given the impact of modernisation and automation, it is fundamental that workers acquire new digital skills. It is therefore crucial to create opportunities for **lifelong**

¹ Report on the transition from institutional care to community-based services in 27 EU Member States, 2020. Available at: [eeg-di-report-2020-1.pdf \(wordpress.com\)](https://www.eeg.eu/eeg-di-report-2020-1.pdf)

learning for the whole population. Focusing not only on the **upskilling** and **reskilling** of professionals but also on persons with disabilities to further eliminate the digital divide and increase independence and quality of life **of persons with disabilities**.

Specific reference is made for the reduction of early school leaving and the increase in participation in upper secondary education. Access to **inclusive education** and early childhood education and care, can prevent family separation and further eliminate the placement of children in institutional care settings.

- ✓ **The number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion should be reduced by at least 15 million by 2030**

28,4% of persons with disabilities are at risk of poverty and social exclusion compared to 18,4% of persons without disabilities. Lifting people out of poverty and also indicating a specific target for children – **‘at least 5 million should be children’** – are indeed important targets. Reducing child poverty also means breaking the cycle of disadvantaged children becoming disadvantaged adults. Given that in many countries poverty remains the reason children are placed in institutional care, it is critical to alleviate them from poverty and to support their families so they can provide parental care.

However, this target should have been higher. Moreover, the social exclusion of children should be further supported with the development of family-based services and preventative services, as well as by ensuring equal access to high-quality ECEC and early childhood intervention services, thereby contributing to the prevention of family separation.

Building a Union of Equality

The adoption of the **EU Work-life Balance directive** in 2019 was an important milestone towards a greater reconciliation of work and family life. In particular, the provision of adequately paid leave for parents and carers is starting to have a positive effect, in particular for women, and with full transposition by August 2022 should contribute to reducing the gender gap in employment. It will also contribute to children’s wellbeing and other family members who need care and/or support from members of the community. We are looking forward to an ambitious transposition of this directive by Member States, also as a means to boost more flexible working, independent living and the implementation of the UNCRPD.

Work-life balance policies are an important part of the **equation for shifting from institutional to community-based settings**. However, they should be completed by adequate resources for families and strong public community-based care infrastructure.

The revision of the Barcelona targets on early childhood education and care in 2022 must be in line with the UNCRC and the UNCRPD, to ensure fully inclusive ECEC infrastructure in Europe, in line with the Council Recommendation on High Quality ECEC. However, care must be approached from a life-cycle perspective, addressing needs from birth to old age.

Living in dignity

Breaking the intergenerational cycles of disadvantage starts with investing in children to reduce the gap between children in need and their better-off peers, when it comes to accessing key services. We must foster equal opportunities for all children in the EU, and prevent children in poor families and children with disabilities from being separated from their biological families. The mentioned **EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and Council Recommendation establishing the European Child Guarantee** have the potential to greatly reduce the number of children living in institutional care, not least children with disabilities.

The Action Plan makes it a priority to support Member States to curb the EU's growing number of people experiencing homelessness. It creates a **European Platform on Combatting Homelessness** that focuses on access to housing as the principled solution to homelessness. The EU Platform on Homelessness should promote deinstitutionalisation and help to scale Housing First as an **effective deinstitutionalisation approach**.

Promoting health and ensuring care

We welcome the **Long-term care initiative** in 2022 that will set a framework for policy reforms to guide the development of sustainable long-term care that ensures better access to quality services for those in need. It is imperative to ensure that this framework will focus on further developing community-based services and facilitating the transition from institutions to services based in the community. Such services shall also include specialised services, such as respite care, personal assistance, but also services to support families, such as childcare.

At the same time, it is important to highlight and welcome that Member States should invest in health and care workforce, improving their working conditions and access to trainings including those related to DI. As mentioned in the EEG guidelines²: 'There is a strong link between personnel and the successful development and maintenance of quality services in the community'.

² [EEG Publications | From institutions to living in the community \(deinstitutionalisation.com\)](#)

Revised Social Scoreboard

The EEG group has been calling for disability indicators of the Social Scoreboard since it was introduced in 2017. Therefore, we welcome the new indicator '**disability employment gap**'. The scoreboard also introduces another important indicator to prevent homelessness, it is the '**housing cost overburden**'. To address child poverty, '**the at-risk-of-poverty rate or exclusion for children (0—17) indicator**' has also been added.

Furthermore, it sets a number of secondary indicators to assess three main components of the pillar: equal opportunities, fair working conditions, and social protection and inclusion.

However, it fails to include a 'deinstitutionalisation indicator' to measure progress in the shift from institutional to community-based settings that the EEG has proposed and has been ready to work on with the EU institutions.

Funding to implement the Pillar

The Action Plan makes a clear reference to EU funds to support delivering on the outputs and outcomes of the Action Plan. A total of EUR 1.8 trillion through the EU's long-term budget for 2021—2027, coupled with the NextGenerationEU recovery instrument, will help Europe recover from the COVID-19 crisis and become greener, more digital and socially just. The **European Social Fund Plus** will be the EU's main instrument to support the implementation of the Social Pillar and achieve the three EU headline targets proposed.

Although the EEG has been advocating for higher percentages we are pleased to see that:

- ✓ at least 25% of the ESF+ resources at the national level should be spent to combat poverty and social exclusion, out of which Member States most affected by child poverty should invest at least 5% in measures combatting child poverty.
- ✓ Member States must dedicate an appropriate amount to the capacity building of social partners and **civil society organisations**, 0.25% of ESF+ resources should be programmed when Member States have a country-specific recommendation in this area.

The EEG urges the EU to implement fair economic and social reforms to leave no one behind in its **Recovery and Resilience Facility**. EEG's position can be found [here](#).

Monitoring

- ✓ There are some clear figures to be used as benchmarks to measure progress towards the targets set out in the action plan in 2025. **The European Semester** will be the relevant framework for the monitoring of its implementation and the revised Social Scoreboard aims to cover the Pillar more extensively.
- ✓ The EEG will keep its commitment to **monitor** and **assess** both the **implementation of the Action Plan** as well as the **use of EU funds**. We want to ensure no money is spent on building new institutions or ‘greening’ existing institutions for adults and children. Rather, social rights will be fulfilled by the development and the deployment of qualitative affordable, accessible community-based services.

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