

## EASPD position on the EU Multiannual Financial Framework regulations post 2020

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### Introduction

The support services sector in the field of disability is undergoing profound changes to make the shift towards the human rights approach introduced by the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** (UN CRPD) in 2006, whereby needs and preferences of the individual are at the core of the attitude towards disability.

The need to initiate profound reforms in the social care systems is at the same time also urged by the changes in the demography: more and more people will be in need of a range of services, whose demand is currently not sufficiently met.

Support services are among the key players for an effective implementation of the **European Pillar of Social Rights**, as well as for the **Sustainable Development Goals**.

The European Union, with its guiding role and financial support, has made it possible to complement national resources and bring forward the needed changes in social care systems across the Europe, however, many challenges are still ahead and reforms in service delivery are to take place in the coming years.

This report aims at giving EASPD’s views and recommendations on the Regulations of the next European Union Multiannual Financial Framework post 2020, focusing on the most relevant funding and financial programmes of for support services in the field of disability.



## InvestEU

The European Commission's Proposal, if complemented by adequate implementation tools and mechanisms, has the potential to create a virtuous circle between authorities, investors, and the social, health, education and housing sectors; helping to leverage significant investment into local innovative social infrastructure projects, thus ensuring that InvestEU has both a positive economic spill over and a strong social impact on the lives of people in Europe.

EASPD welcomes:

- ✓ Creation of a "Social Investment & Skills" objective & policy window doubling the guarantee dedicated to such investments in EFSI, thus responding to the increase in demand and emerging political priority of this issue.
- ✓ Development of window-specific investment guidelines, recognising the different needs of the sectors involved in these four windows.
- ✓ Significant yet realistic increase of the budget dedicated to capacity-building, which will be crucial to link up local innovative project ideas to the InvestEU programme.
- ✓ Stronger focus on reaching out to smaller and local projects, which are the standard for social infrastructure projects.

### **EASPD recommendations**



We encourage a stronger emphasis on ensuring that InvestEU is used to support quality social infrastructure projects, which best respond to the real needs of citizens and to sustainability. This may mean investing into projects which are smaller, innovative and financially riskier, yet still economically viable and with a higher social return; rather than larger, risk-free, yet out-dated, projects. Investing into quality social projects would be the real added value of an EU guarantee, especially with a stronger long-term return. In terms of mechanisms, this could be done through a similar system to the "enabling conditions" in the Common Provisions Regulation and/or by setting the guarantee rate in direct correlation with the "quality of life impact" to be achieved.



The proposed governance framework is also very top heavy with the experts in the Advisory Board, Project Team and the Investment Committee expected to come from the implementing partners or financial experts, with very little room for input from the sectors benefitting. This would again lead to distancing the InvestEU instruments to the innovative social projects which exist at local level. We therefore encourage the creation of a window-specific Steering Board - made up of various sectoral representatives from the beneficiaries, investors and independent experts- to bridge this gap. These Steering Boards would also be ideal instruments through which to develop the Investment Guidelines.





Whilst we welcome the important increase in the Capacity Building budget, there is significant risk that this budget be used to build capacity on the investors side alone, primarily through the implementing partners. We therefore strongly encourage that an important proportion of this dedicated budget is used to directly build capacity within the social sectors. This will help to create a sustainable pipeline of quality social infrastructure projects for the years to come, supporting people at local level and financed by the InvestEU programme. The Steering Board could play the intermediary role.



One of the specificities of social infrastructure investment is that it relies heavily (and for good reasons) on public investment; either directly or indirectly. Therefore, unlocking social infrastructure investment requires a secure and continuous stream of public funding; an area which has been limited the past decade with a severe impact on the sectors involved. Through the “investment clause 2.2”, the Stability and Growth Pact allows Member States to deviate from the Pact’s rules when they are co-financing investment projects supported by the European Fund for Strategic Investments, under certain conditions. Therefore, short of reforming the EU fiscal rules which has had a proven detrimental impact on social infrastructure investment, we strongly encourage a more systematic use of the investment clause 2.2 in the Stability and Growth Pact to help unlock social infrastructure investment in Europe.

## Common Provision Regulations (CPR), European Social Fund + (ESF+) and European Regional and Development Fund (ERDF)

***Social and health support services have since the very beginning relied on European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), which are key for the development of innovation in service provision through training of staff and set up of new facilities. These include the funding of employment support for groups at risk of exclusion, inclusive education measures, inclusion projects and quality social care and support among many others. Moreover, following years of tightened public investment towards the social sector, the ESIF funds often replace State investment, becoming therefore fundamental to fund the regular running of the activities.***

EASPD welcomes:



The use of funds linked to “enabling conditions” that need to be applied and monitored throughout the funding. We specifically welcome enabling condition 4.3 that requires to put in place a national strategic framework for poverty reduction and social inclusion which would enable all EU Member States to use ESF+ and ERDF for the transition from institutional to community-based care. This would also ensure that civil society and social partners can closely participate in the design, implementation, monitoring and review of the development of national strategic frameworks.



- ✓ Targeted actions to promote the transition from institutional care to family and community-based care, in particular for those who face multiple discrimination.
- ✓ The reference in ESF+ and ERDF to use the funds to promote equal access for all to quality, non-segregated and inclusive education and training, in particular for disadvantaged groups
- ✓ The use of ESF+ to support the implementation of policies targeting the most disadvantaged people and to enhance timely and equal access to affordable, sustainable and high-quality family and community-based care services.
- ✓ Reference to use ESF+ to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities on an equal basis with others and contribute to the implementation of the UN CRPD.
- ✓ The possibility for Member States to allocate in their Partnership Agreement an amount of ERDF and ESF+ to be contributed to InvestEU and delivered through budgetary guarantees.

### **EASPD recommendations**



It is essential to require the use of ERDF to invest in services and infrastructures that support social inclusion of people; the use of funds for building or renovating segregating institutional care should be forbidden. The lack of this will hamper the development of community-based service provision in the most remote and under-developed areas of Europe and will likely prevent to set adequate standards - based on the human rights framework of the UN CRPD - for the development of person-centred planning.

### **Employment and Social Innovation programme (EaSI)**

***Via the EaSI programme the most vulnerable categories of people were reached out to. It is clear that these funding tools have been indispensable to connect EU policies with grassroots level issues – and the other way around – via meaningful networks. It will be essential in the future to maintain these funding possibilities to further reinforce and increase the value of Europe for all its citizens and prevent further discrimination.***

EASPD welcomes:

- ✓ The recognition of the EaSI programme as an instrument to promote connection with the most marginalised groups in Europe via employment, social innovation and experimentation, inclusive info-sharing.
- ✓ The use of EaSI to support the development of social enterprises.

### **EASPD recommendations**

-  Ensure adequate resources are allocated to fund European networks that promote and contribute to the values of the European Union, reaching out to the most excluded in society. The funding should aim at multiannual cooperation to set long-term objectives with a sustainable impact.
-  Recognise the value of European NGOs in their bridging role between the grassroots level and EU policy makers, highlighting therefore the needs of otherwise not-well represented target groups in policy-making.
-  The simplification of the funding rules should lead to more efficient management of funds by both funders and the beneficiaries.

## Erasmus +

***The Erasmus programme has a huge potential to contribute to the implementation of the European Education Area, but it needs to have the tools to include everyone.***

EASPD welcomes:

-  The doubling of the budget.
-  The differentiation of partnerships between innovation and mutual learning, allowing more room for projects dedicated to the scale up of practices.
-  Simplification of procedures.

### **EASPD recommendations**

-  It's important to keep a dedicated budget for special needs that should be separated from the main budget of projects, so as not to compete with other categories
-  No reference to the UNCRPD or the European Disability Strategy are made, while there are references to many other European commitments such as the Sustainable Goals and the Youth Strategy. Reference to the UN CRPD would ensure a stronger coverage of the educational needs of persons with disabilities.

## Solidarity Corps

***The proposal is solid and has the potential to offer opportunities to access the programme to many citizens.***

EASPD welcomes:

-  Separate budget of the Solidarity Corps programme from Erasmus + and its increase compared to how it is currently included in the EVS budget.

- ✓ Importance of social enterprises in ensuring the success of the programme.
- ✓ Use of the Quality Label, to ensure the programme doesn't put at risk staff to have worse working conditions or users to receive lesser quality care.

### **EASPD recommendations**

-  The European Solidarity Corps portal should be fully accessible to persons with disabilities to open up its possibilities to all.
-  A budget to support individuals with support needs should be provided to ensure all potential beneficiaries can benefit from the programme equally. This dedicated budget should be separated from the main budget of projects, so as not to compete with other categories

## **Digital Europe**

***Digital Europe – as per the current proposal – is at risk of leaving aside the social care and support services sector from digital transformation of EU societies. Given the huge need for reforms, also in light of technological developments at world level, it is essential to broaden the perspective of this programme making it fully accessible to all sectors.***

EASPD welcomes:

- ✓ Investments in response to challenges arising from current digital transformation
- ✓ Measures addressing the skills needed to adapt to digital society
- ✓ Actions to improve efficiency and quality of services in areas of public interest

### **EASPD recommendations**

-  There are no references to Assistive Technology<sup>1</sup>. This key enabling technology is not mentioned in the Programme, thus a broad range of people with support needs could be left out and will not benefit from the digital and technological transformation.
-  No reference to technology-based solutions for the inclusion and accessibility of persons with disabilities is made. Even though there is a strong focus on Artificial Intelligence, its possible use does not include the strong potential for inclusion coming from high-tech solutions such as robotics or cognitive technology.
-  The programme refers only to advanced digital skills, notably in high performance computing, artificial intelligence and cybersecurity. No references are made to the need to gain, develop and maintain basic or medium digital skills that are essential for current

<sup>1</sup> Assistive Technology is a wide spectrum of products, technology-based services or solutions that enables people with activity limitations of all ages in their daily lives, work, education and leisure.

and future workforce. The complementarity with other EU funding programmes, such as the new Erasmus+ programme, should not create a double speeds system that indirectly prevents some sectors – especially those such as the support services sector that are facing a delay in up taking technology – to apply for more than one funding programme. All EU funding streams should be equally accessible by all sectors.



The Digital Innovation Hubs (DIH) are entities at members states level providing access to technological expertise and experimentation facilities. ‘Thematic’ or ‘Cross-sectorial’ Innovation Hubs should be included in addition to DIH at member states level. These new hubs could help organisations from such sectors, such as the social care and support sector, slower in the uptake of the benefits from technological and digital transformation.

## Horizon Europe

***The Horizon Europe proposal may exclude the social care and support sector from the key research and innovation programme of the EU. It is essential that the Proposal includes a broader definition of health that takes into consideration also mental and social wellbeing besides elements related to physical health.***

EASPD welcomes:

- ✓ Encouragement in the proposal of the greater involvement of citizens and civil society organisations in co-designing and co-creating the research and innovation agenda.
- ✓ Mission-based approach and impacts orientation.
- ✓ Move towards more simplification in administration.
- ✓ Greater involvement of small and medium-size innovators.

### **EASPD recommendations**



The shift from “*Health, demographic change and wellbeing*” towards “*Health*” narrows down the focus of interventions that could be funded to tackle diverse societal challenges under Horizon Europe. This is a missed opportunity as the challenges that Europe is facing are not limited to the provision of medical solutions. The challenges require a holistic approach that includes, among others, social care and support solutions. The narrow definition of health poses the danger of turning back to the medical approach, contrary to the principles of the UN CRPD and the human rights approach that it promotes.



Even though the total budget for Research & Innovation has increased in comparison to the previous Framework Programme, the clusters ‘*Inclusive, reflective & innovative society*’ and ‘*Secure society*’ from Horizon 2020 seem to have been merged into “*Inclusive & secure societies*” in Horizon Europe with a lower combined budget. This serves as a worrying sign that Europe is not only is spending less on inclusion but is limiting the scope of social inclusion to security matters.



The areas of intervention within the *'Inclusive and secure'* are limited to *"Democracy; Cultural heritage; Social and economic transformations; Disaster-resilient societies; Protection and Security; Cybersecurity."* The focus has shifted away from the inclusion of vulnerable groups, such as persons with disabilities. There is nothing on supporting measures to improve inclusion of and accessibility for persons with disabilities. This limitation will lead to the exclusion of organisations supporting persons with disabilities through assistive technology and digital solutions from Horizon Europe. The sector of social care and support for persons with disabilities is already highly underfunded and lacks investment in research in innovation. Excluding this sector will further widen digital divide, which is contrary to what the European Union stands for.



While there is commitment to use the broader definition of innovation that includes social innovation, there is still uncertainty on how Horizon Europe is intending to encourage innovation in a broader sense that is not limited to digital and technological developments only. There is little mentioning of social innovation, which poses the risk of watering down and limiting the intent to pursue social innovation objectives. Providing better health and care to EU citizens is not limited to creating advanced robotics and digital solutions, there is an urgent need to support innovative techniques and methods for organisational change and transition to community-based services.



## Conclusions: EASPD's key messages for next EU Multiannual Financial Framework

Care and support services are the engine of the European project. They enable people to live better, longer and healthier lives. They help persons with disabilities to have full and active lives in society. They ensure that children can have decent lives and education, for active participation in society. They also help to provide choice and options to these people's families and friends in terms of informal care and support.

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Overall, EASPD considers the next EU budget should aim at the following:

- 1. Social Inclusion must be targeted** throughout the EU Budget. The earmarking for social inclusion in ESF+ and a social window in the InvestEU programme is very positive. There is room for improvement in the Horizon Europe and Digital Europe programmes however. These programmes have much potential for supporting innovation in one of Europe's biggest growing sectors, yet they underwhelm in this regard.
- 2. Improved access to EU funds**, notably through the simplification measures. Caution is required to ensure that the simplification measures also benefit the beneficiaries; not just the managing authorities. The proposed decrease in EU co-financing in ESF+ is also a step in the wrong direction as it will simply lead to less quality social projects being financed.
- 3. EU funds should be synonymous to quality investment**; which is why we welcome the strengthened approach to "enabling conditions" in ESF+ and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), as well as the development of quality investment guidelines in InvestEU.



## Who is EASPD

[EASPD](#) (European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities) is a European NGO network representing 15.000 social and health support provider organisations across Europe and across disabilities, working towards the promotion of equal opportunities for persons with disabilities through effective and high-quality service systems.

Since the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) came into force, it has become the core of EASPD's policy strategy. EASPD is accredited to the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and our members are committed to facilitate human rights enjoyment within the framework of the Convention and to empower persons with disabilities through effective and high-quality service systems.

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EASPD is registered at the Transparency Register under the following number: 120906010805-50.

## Who are social and health support services represented by EASPD

Social and health support services for persons with disabilities represented in EASPD's membership include a range of support services such as services providing support in the field of employment, education, housing, day care and respite facilities, prevention, early intervention, community-based living, arts, culture, sport and leisure activities, etc. These services are essential to persons with disabilities to participate in society, enjoy their human rights and be empowered to live as independent as possible.

## Key figures and facts

- 80 Million citizens in Europe have a disability
- Social services directly employ over 10 million professionals in Europe
- 1.75 million new jobs were created between 2008 and 2015 in the social and health services sector
- The health and social services sector represents a 7<sup>th</sup> of EU GDP<sup>2</sup>; a growing amount of that being the social services sector alone.

## Contacts

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<sup>2</sup>European Commission – EU Employment and Social Situation – Quarterly Review – Supplement December 2014

