

EU Funding programs post 2020 – Opportunities for Social Services

Briefing Paper

Introduction

The European Platform for Rehabilitation (EPR) informs members regularly about latest EU policies initiatives. Within the past two years, EPR has kept members up to date with the developments and negotiations of the future multiannual financial framework post in the European Institutions. EPR has monitored and analysed new opportunities and challenges of the future funding programs, followed negotiations and contributing to further analysis of the new funding programs proposals together with the network Social Services Europe to which EPR is member.

On EU Funding programs post 2020 – Opportunities for Social Services, EPR summarises currently under negotiation EU funding programs post 2020 and provides a clear overview of the novelties, opportunities and challenges those represent for EPR members and alike non for profit organisations. Therefore, the aim of this briefing paper is to illustrate and inform our membership on what opportunities the future funding programs of the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2017 offer for social services.

This briefing paper provides an overview of the funding programs more often monitored by our secretariat and of most interest for our members due to the thematic they cover.

EPR as network of service providers for people with disabilities focuses on being up to date with the trends on services and needs of people with disabilities. Looking out to improve the know-how of services and to best address them by mutual learning activities and peer to peer exchange between the professionals of its membership and the coordination and facilitation of the Secretariat in Brussels. EPR regularly informs its members through 'funding alerts' about calls for proposals under the different EU funding programs that relate to our sector of activity and this of our members. Currently, EPR is contributing to the development of various EU funded projects under the Erasmus + program as project coordinator and as project partner.

EU funding programs post-2020

EU funding programs are gathered under the umbrella of the multiannual financial framework (MFF). The MFF is the European Union long term budget covering a period of minimum five years. The current and future periods are of seven years being the future period between 2021-2027. The MFF sets the limits for the EU spending both as a whole but also in specific areas of activity for a period of minimum five years. One of the key objectives of the MFF is to align the budget with political priorities. The process of the negotiating a new multiannual financial framework kicks off with legislative proposals launched by the European Commission that need to be approved and negotiated with the approval of the European Parliament and Council. At present, negotiations are taking place to agree on the budgetary allocation for every funding program and political priority that will conclude with the approval of the EU funding programs post 2020 and the establishment of the new MFF 2021-2027.

Social Services

Social services of general interest (SSGI) are, as defined by the European Commission, employment and training services, social housing, child care, long-term care and social assistance services. They are services provided directly to a person, usually with support needs, or their families. In practice quality social services: enable people to live better, longer and healthier lives; provide people with the capacity and skills to take an active part in the community and workplace; help persons with disabilities to have full and active lives in society; ensure that children can have decent lives and education, providing them with the crucial means needed for their active participation in society; provide guidance and support for migrants to integrate fully into society; support integration and reintegration into the labour market; help to fight against poverty and social exclusion (including homelessness) and discrimination¹. FOOT NOTE

By doing so, social services help to provide choice and options to these people's families and friends in terms of informal care and support. European policies and social investment instruments are crucial to the development of the social services sector, activities, innovation and resilience.² EPR works develops analysis and works on policy initiatives that affect the social services sector. In recent years, EPR has worked in social investment in social services; job creation, recruitment and retention and public procurement. Furthermore, EPR contributes by providing input and expertise from its members to the overall work developed by Social Services Europe.

EU funding programs post 2020

EPR members work with concrete EU funding programs which are of particular interest to their field of work. As such, Erasmus +, Horizon 2020 renamed to Horizon Europe, the Rights and Values program, Digital Europe and ESF now ESF+ are of most interest to the EPR network.

¹ Social Services Europe, *Enabling social services through the Multiannual Financial Framework post-2020: a European Imperative*. Position paper, Brussels, 2018.

² Idem.

Within the development and negotiations of the multiannual financial framework, the EU funding programs have experienced changes and improvements in their structure, budget and nature. EPR general overview of the EU funding programs post 2020 remarks positively the increased budget allocation to some funding programs, for example the increased dedicated budget to training for professionals under Erasmus +. In comparison to the previous budgetary period, it is positive to see efforts from the European Commission to simply the funding programs including the direct management from the European Union. This simplification will contribute to making the best use of the funds, having more actors being able to apply. The proposal of having common rules between programs will also contribute to this end.

Below, this briefing paper looks into the above mentioned EU funding programs highlighting their novelties, changes and scope in comparison to the previous funding period (2017-2021).

European Social Fund + (ESF+)



The European Social Fund + (ESF+) is the main EU funding instrument tackling social inclusion. To do so, ESF+ aims at supporting employment, people access to employment and strive for fairer working conditions. This fund objective is to invest on people, workers, young people and any European citizen in need of employment. As a result, ESF+ aims to achieve better adaptability of workers providing them with new skills and providing enterprises with new ways of working.

ESF+ focus on improving access to employment targets making easier the transition from school to work or training job seekers to improve their opportunities to access employment. Two key areas EPR works in such as vocational training and life-long learning are at the core of many projects funded under ESF+. Furthermore, this funding program helps disadvantaged groups accessing employment or returning to employment. EPR as a network working with service providers to people with disabilities works extensively on employment and helping people with disabilities accessing employment, helping creating partnership with employers to move towards more inclusive labour markets. Therefore, ESF+ is a key funding pillar for our network. Under the core objectives of this funding program are to improve social inclusion and combating poverty.³

ESF+ budget allocation for the next period is currently being negotiated in the period this briefing paper is produced. The budget being negotiated is of 100 billion euros. Current negotiations show changes in comparison to the previous funding period for this fund. The future ESF merges various funding programs together under the umbrella of ESF+. As a result, the European Social Fund (ESF), Youth Employment Initiative, Employment and Social Innovation, EaSI, the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) and the EU Health program are gathered under ESF+. The inclusion of the health program under ESF is a novelty for the next funding period. So far, both programs belonged to different budget allocations being the health program separated itself.

³ European Commission, European Social Fund, online source : <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=50&langId=en>

The new proposal for ESF+ presents a clear alignment with EU policies in social, health and the employment sector. In addition, an increased alignment to the European Semester and the European Pillar of Social Rights is included. Both, alignment of the above mentioned policies together with the main instruments for their implementation would positively benefit the social sector. EPR welcomes the alignment of policies in social, health and employment.

Another novelty included in the currently negotiated ESF+ is an increased relevance given to the role social innovation has. Social innovation can open the door to employment and overcoming societal challenges through innovative approaches. Within the program, 25 per cent of the whole budget is being negotiated to address social inclusion.

Social services have a key role as creators of employment opportunities. Current ageing of the EU population demands increasing social services for what the role social services play not only grows but needs to be filled with more employers. The social services sector is one of the biggest job creators in Europe having created nearly 2 million jobs over a period of ten years. However, social services have currently experience important budget cuts due to the economic crisis. As a result, pressure on costs and expenditure have influenced working conditions which are poorer and challenging the attraction of skilled qualified personnel.⁴ To effectively deliver quality services and meet the demands of the ageing population, boosting investment in social services is needed. To do so, training staff and moving to community-based services is key. The support of the new ESF+ will be crucial to meet the needs of the sector in the upcoming years.

ESF+ scope and allocation of budget is crucial to meet the needs of social services and hence of the EU population. Civil society organisations have demanded a percentage of 30 per cent to be allocated to this funding program from the total budget of the Union. At present, current negotiations show a compromise of the 25-27 percent.

Erasmus+

Erasmus + is the main EU funding program to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe.⁵

During the current budgetary period 2014-2020, Erasmus + has a budget of 14.7 billion euros. Proposals for the next budgetary period (2021-2027) show the program will see its budget doubled. The allocation negotiated is of 30 billion euros. As stated by the European Commission dissemination of information, the aim of having an increased budget is to reach out to more beneficiaries especially young people but also adults and learners in vocational education and training. An important addition is the reinforcement of the program in reaching out to people from all social backgrounds and expand the scope of the projects providing opportunities of mobility and cooperation with third countries.⁶



⁴ Social Services Europe, *Enabling social services through the Multiannual Financial Framework post-2020: a European Imperative*. Position paper, Brussels, 2018.

⁵ European Commission, Erasmus +, online source: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about_en

⁶ Idem.

On the technical side, novelties to this EU funding program include an improved online tool that will ease the reporting process and the dissemination of outcomes. Changes will include a re designation of national agencies in charge and more coherence between different countries ensuring simplified and reduced reporting.

The Erasmus+ program is set to contribute to the EU objectives on employment, social inclusion and equality and also the objectives of the EU strategic framework for education and training: make lifelong learning and mobility a reality; improve the quality and efficiency of education and training; promote equity, social cohesion, and active citizenship and enhance creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training. Erasmus+ also strives to achieve the objectives of the EU Youth Strategy. The EU Youth Strategy is the framework for EU youth policy cooperation for 2019-2027 focusing on three core areas of action, around the three words: engage, connect and empower.

Overall, the Erasmus + funding program contributes to reducing unemployment, especially among young people; promoting adult learning, especially for new skills and skills required by the labour market; encouraging young people to take part in European democracy; supporting innovation, cooperation and reform; reducing early school leaving; promoting cooperation and mobility with the EU's partner countries.⁷

EPR members actively engage and benefit from Erasmus+ funded projects. Cooperation between professionals, training to improve co-production of services for people with disabilities, peer to peer trainings and sharing good practice are some of the actions members of the EPR network are able to engage with under the funding of this program. Delivering more and better services requires of retraining skills and adapting to new challenges such as increasingly delivering community-based services, including service users on the design and delivery of services and, regarding services for people with disabilities, implementing a rights-based approach to meet the UN CRPD.

Horizon Europe

Horizon Europe is the next research and innovation funding program of the European Union. Previously known by Horizon 2020. This program is one of the most ambitious of the next budgetary period with a proposal allocation by the European Commission of 100 billion euros. This amount is increased in 20 billion euro from the previous funding period.⁸



A key novelty of the program greatly welcome by EPR is the support Horizon Europe will offer to research and innovation in the social sector. On these lines, health, inclusive and secure society (access to fundamental rights, socio-economic transformations contributing to inclusion), digital skills improvement and mobility will be supported.

To put in practice the program, the European Commission will set up a multiannual strategic plan to prepare the work programs and calls for proposals of the first four years of this funding program. The new Horizon

⁷ Idem.

⁸ European Commission, Horizon Europe, online source: https://ec.europa.eu/info/horizon-europe-next-research-and-innovation-framework-programme_en

program plans to have clearly defined targets to ensure research and innovation missions funded are more effective.

Horizon Europe will have five core mission areas focused on: adaptation to climate change including societal transformation; cancer; climate-neutral and smart cities; healthy oceans; soil health and food⁹.

In the technical aspect of the program implementation, processes will be simplified for reporting and reimbursements tasks. In addition, the European Commission announced there will be more flexibility in funds allocation and costs claims.

Rights and Values

Rights and values is a new program gathering together two previous funds the Rights, Equality and Citizenship program, and Europe for Citizens program. The idea behind merging both programs is to simplify, reinforce mutually both programs and have a major influence, as stated by the European Commission.

The main objectives of the rights and values program are to focused on strengthening the EU values of inclusiveness, the rule of law, equality and democracy. As a result, the main aim of this funding program will be to protect and promote the values enshrined in the EU Treaties.¹⁰ The fund will have a budget allocation of 600 million euros.

The objectives will be fulfilled with providing funding on three main strands:

- Promotion of equality and rights: focus on preventing and combating inequalities and discrimination, supporting policies to promote and mainstream gender equality and anti-discrimination, as well as policies to combat racism and all forms of intolerance, protecting and promoting the rights of the child, the rights of people with disabilities, Union citizenship rights and the right to the protection of personal data.
- Promotion democratic participation and cultural heritage: focus on increasing citizens' understanding of the Union, its history, cultural heritage and diversity, and promoting exchange and cooperation between citizens of different countries.
- Fight against all forms of violence (Daphne strand) specifically supporting those groups at risk: focus on preventing and combating all forms of violence against children, young people, women and other groups at risk such as people with disabilities, and supporting and protecting victims of such violence.

⁹ Idem.

¹⁰ European Parliament, online legislation source: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-new-boost-for-jobs-growth-and-investment/file-mff-rights-and-values-programme>

Digital Europe

Digital Europe is a new fund program proposal to implement the European Commission's Communication on transformation of health and care in the digital single market. Its main aim is to support the digital transformation of Europe. The budgetary allocation if approved would be of up to 9.2 billion euros. Digital skills will be 700 million euros and for a wide use of technologies across society and economy 1.3 billion euros.

The program focuses on the following objectives:

- ✗ further digital education for employers and employees.
- ✗ forge and promote digital networks cooperation and synergies between sectors.
- ✗ create digital tools to access social services and improve citizens' engagement.

The participation and capacity building of social partners and non-profits is a key objective of this program. Some activities and thematic supported by the program will be to boost investments supercomputing, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, advanced digital skills, and ensuring a wide use of digital technologies across the economy and society.¹¹

Challenges and Opportunities of the EU funding programs post 2020 for social services

Having analysed the new funding programs post 2020, EPR presents its members identified challenges and opportunities for the social sector under the future budget of the EU.

Challenges:

- ✗ Lack of a clear alignment of merged funding programs with the European Pillar of Social Rights.
- ✗ A market-driven approach remains above focusing on citizens' needs and over-focus on employment for social inclusion. Fulfilling agreed social rights could be at the core of the budget priorities with a lesser focus on employment or adapting employability of people to the market's needs.
- ✗ People with disabilities should be systematically included in the target groups, allocating funding to improve the gathering and collation of data of people with disabilities aiming at improving policies and services addressed to them.
- ✗ As a result of merging the health programme within the European Social Fund, reference to health care' is broadly used. Clear references to 'social care' and 'social services' need to be included.

Opportunities:

- ✓ The net increase in funding in most programmes will help bringing policies into concrete actions.
- ✓ The references made to social inclusion in different programmes sends the message of a better transversally integration of social inclusion throughout future policies.

¹¹ European Commission, Digital Europe programme, online source: <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/digital-europe-programme-proposed-eu92-billion-funding-2021-2027>

- ✓ The simplification and more direct management from the EU, which permits single entry points for applicants, removing obstacles for funding will help local actors to engage in more funding programs.
- ✓ The 25% of the Management Strand within the ESF+ fund dedicated to social inclusion priorities.

Once assessed the programs, having identified challenges and opportunities, EPR together with members and partners from Social Services Europe proposes the following recommendations to make sure the future EU funding programs post 2020 meet the needs of the social services sector:

- A minimum of 30 per cent should be dedicated to social inclusion priorities in the Management Strand of the ESF+.
- A closer alignment of objectives with the Social Pillar should be achieved.
- A holistic approach on social inclusion issues should be adopted.
- People with disabilities should be systematically specified as a group of interest rather than to be under the more general umbrella of 'disadvantaged groups'.
- Long-term care should be clearly mentioned under the ESF+.
- A clear delimitation and clear mentions of social care, social services and health care.
- Beneficiaries should be involved in the process of the operational design of the programmes to contribute to making the management of the funds easier.

Conclusions

EPR together with its members and partners positively welcome the new funding proposals as outlined by the European Commission for the upcoming multiannual financial framework 2021-2027. Proposed programs clearly show increased efforts to align policies and budgetary allocation to move forward to a more socially inclusive European Union. Our network considers crucial the alignment of social, health and employment to be used for more integrated policy schemes between these areas taking into account cost. Although the main narrative responds to meeting labour market needs above putting people social rights first, we are confident the new Commission working plan will provide with an action for the Pillar of Social Rights that will bring the proclaimed commitment to a reality helping to match the budgetary programs with social policy for a more social Europe.

Social services as employers and as crucial actors helping ageing EU population to have a quality of life, will keep a closer eye to the negotiations and support the EU institutions in a successful implementation of this programs.