

Position Paper
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Social Services Europe

Enabling social services through the Multiannual Financial Framework post-2020: a European Imperative

I. Introduction: Social Services and the EU budget

Social Services Europe brings together eight Europe-wide networks of not-for-profit providers of social and health care services. Together, we represent over 100,000 organisations who have a strong track record in providing value-driven services for millions of the most disadvantaged persons in our societies.

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 discrimination

By doing so, they also help to provide choice and options to these people's families and friends in terms of informal care and support.

Social Services Europe advocates for the accessibility, affordability and availability of quality social and health services all across Europe. This requires ensuring the appropriate organisation, funding and delivery of these services, particularly in an improving yet uncertain economic and social context.

European policies and social investment instruments are crucial to the development of our sector's activities, innovation and resilience. We have developed the following position paper, based on our sector's significant on-the-ground experience and technical know-how of working with European funds and policies

II. How can investing in social services contribute to implement the EU's fundamental principles and rights?

The European Union's main values draw upon its fundamental principles included in the Treaty of Lisbon¹, in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European Social Charter. Sustainability, equality and peace, understood as preventing the increase of extremism, and promoting cohesion are some of these principles. Member States have made commitments to deliver on EU fundamental rights and many of these rights are now included and spelled out within the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Quality social services are key to ensure the implementation of at least 10 principles within the EPSR:

- Principle 01 – Social services assist in the achievement of **inclusive education, training and life-long learning** by support all people to have access to such opportunities.

¹ Articles 9 and 10 of the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union

- Principle 02 – Social services support **gender equality** by providing care and support to enable parents or family, often women, the choice to work if they wish to.
- Principle 03 – Social services support **equal opportunities**, by helping all people to access employment, social protection, education and access to goods and services.
- Principle 04 – Social services assist in **active support to employment**, by providing personalised, continuous and consistent support to help disadvantaged persons onto the labour market.
- Principle 09 – Social services support **work-life balance**, by providing care services to those who need it.
- Principle 11 – Social services provide **childcare and support to children**, by providing childcare services to those who need it, as well as additional support for disadvantaged children and/or families.
- Principle 17 – Social services support the **inclusion of people with disabilities**, by providing services that enable people with disabilities to participate in society and in the labour market.
- Principle 18 – Social services support the provision of **long-term care**, by providing quality, community-based long-term care services to people who need it.
- Principle 19 – Social services assist the provision of **housing and assistance for the homeless**, by providing support services for homeless people.
- Principle 20 – Social services help to increase **access to essential services**, by helping disadvantaged people to access such services.

Investing in quality social and health services is, therefore, investing in the realisation of many of the fundamental rights of the EU.

Social Cohesion

Social cohesion is one of the principal aims of the European Union. Social services are key in achieving social convergence and cohesion within the EU; reducing inequalities and supporting social developments as outlined in the various sections below. Adequately funded not for profit social and health care service providers will ensure a sustainable provision of social services that contributes to integration and social inclusion for all people; and therefore building social cohesion in our local communities. Social services are also crucial to the development of rural areas; often being one of only remaining economic operators.

Solidarity

The principle of solidarity between Member States of the EU refers to sharing both advantages and burdens equally (Eurofound, 2011²). Both the EU Charter and the Treaty of Lisbon refer to enforcement of these solidarity rights. Investing in social services is one tool to implement solidarity; redistributing advantages and ensuring burdens are shared.

Equality

In the EU, the principle of equality refers to being equal before the Law and being able to fully enjoy rights equally to others. Providing quality, affordable and accessible services help disadvantaged groups in the European society to fully enjoy their rights. Social services delivered to children, migrants, people with disabilities, women or older persons - groups often subject to inequalities and discrimination - have a real social weight in building equality in the EU. Care services can also help work-life balance and gender and employment equality, allowing more informal carers -often women – the choice to work.

² <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/observatories/eurwork/industrial-relations-dictionary/solidarity-principle>

Peace, security and safety

Peace, understood as preventing the increase of extremism, is currently one of the main concerns of the EU as stated in the European Commission white paper of the Future of Europe³. At the institutional level agreements are being reached to prioritize security, safety and defence. Strong, inclusive and cohesive societies are the best way to build safer societies and the EU budget must contribute to initiatives that tackle inequalities, rebuild trust and overcome deep divisions⁴.

Social Services Europe believes that universal access to services is key for inclusive, hate-free societies. Social services are essential in countering the rise of extremism, preventing radicalisation; fighting alienation through promoting social cohesion and integration. They support integration through services supporting access to the labour market, training, cultural courses. They contribute to and create peaceful communities and cultural bonding through actions bringing communities together and building mutual understanding; Investing in social services supports disadvantaged people to find a place in society and lessens the need for people to express their discontent via extremist views.

Social protection

As the Social Platform has noted, while solidarity and social protection are overarching priorities for about two thirds of European Citizens⁵, EU social expenditure represents only 0.3% of total public expenditure in the EU⁶. Europeans spend less than a single cent of taxes on European solutions to their social needs and priorities, yet the 2018 AGS emphasises the need for social protection systems that ensure equal access to quality services. Therefore, investment in social protection from the EU budget should be increased.

III. How can investing in social services contribute to address specific challenges in the EU?

Making Europe's economy more stable, inclusive, productive and resilient

Social services play a crucial role in making a more stable, inclusive, productive and resilient economy by helping to create more empowered, skilled and socially active citizens in Europe, especially relevant for disadvantaged persons. Targeted investment into social care and support services can help to ensure that all persons can participate in society, employment and education. This is especially crucial for the European economy given the ageing population, changing family patterns, higher migration and the impact of digitalization and automation.

- EU investment into social services is not only socially responsible, it is also economically smart for Europe.

Integration and Inclusion of Migrants in Europe

Integration of migrants is one of the most important and key challenges the EU is facing in the past years. Although migration is not a new phenomenon for Europe, an increased number of people have arrived to the EU seeking international protection due to global political crisis. Migrants, asylum seekers and refugees have rightly become an urgent topic on the EU political agenda.

Social services have been involved in the provision of short and long-term solutions for building

³ European Commission (2017) "White Paper on the Future of Europe. Reflections and scenarios for the EU27 by 2025" COM(2017)2025 of 1 March 2017

⁴ Social Services Europe supports the Social Platform position in this regard

⁵ [Special Eurobarometer 467 – Wave EB88.1 – TNS opinion & social](#), November 2017

⁶ [Reflection Paper on the Future of EU Finances](#), 28 June 2017

welcoming societies and fostering the integration of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in the receiving countries, as well as the integration of other disadvantaged people within their own country. Actions provided by social services go from emergency support for new arrivals to long term integration and inclusion services and support in destination countries. The work of not for profit social and health care service providers is crucial for migrants' self-empowerment and confidence building as well as for their social and labour market inclusion.

- EU funding will help the integration and inclusion of migrants.

Creating employment opportunities for all and job creation in the social sector

Although improving, unemployment and in particular long-term and youth unemployment- remains high. In addition to the employment support noted above, the social services sector itself has a role to play in job creation, as the population grows older and demands for social services increase, the social services sector grows too. The Social Services sector is therefore one of Europe's biggest job creators with nearly [2 million new jobs created in ten years](#). Social services currently face challenges such as pressure on costs, and therefore working conditions, and a shortage of skilled workers in the sector. Europe's demographic changes will require extra investment and higher number of workers on the sector to effectively deliver quality services to an increasing number of people with support needs. There is also a need to train and re-train staff, in view of the shift to community-based services. Investing in the sector would provide a win-win opportunity to meet increasing demand for social services and unlock millions of new jobs in social services. Social Services Europe has commissioned research to investigate the barriers to and potential of [job creation within the social services sector](#)⁷.

- EU funding for social services will help to create employment opportunities for disadvantaged persons and unlock job creation in social services in Europe.

Quality education and training for all

As highlighted by the Annual Growth Survey 2018, "efforts should be made to ensure equal opportunity and access to education and training to ensure social inclusion and better economic outcomes". The AGS also adds that this is particularly important for disadvantaged groups. Throughout Europe, social services play an active role; both in bringing disadvantaged persons closer to mainstream education systems, as well as providing the more targeted education and training themselves, including vocational training.

- EU funding for social services will help to ensure all persons have access to quality education and training

Rural development

Challenges in rural areas include depopulation and challenges to sustainability of communities (Westhoek et al 2006). Local services (such as schools, general health services, childcare) take longer to reach in rural and suburban areas (EC, 2017). Ensuring access to social services in rural areas prevents depopulation and support sustainable communities by reducing the need to move elsewhere, as well as ensuring quality of life and fulfilment of rights. Investment in this service provision in rural areas could support the development of innovative, flexible service offers to ensure access in sparsely populated areas. They are also important for job creation and economic development in such areas.

⁷ [Social Services Europe \(2017\) Recruitment and Retention in Social Services – Unlocking the Sector's Job Creation Potential](#)

- EU funding for social services will help to bridge the urban/rural divide

Digitalisation and new technologies

As for many sectors, new technologies will have a significant impact on the way care and support services for disadvantaged persons are provided. Technologies can -if well developed- help to improve the quality of the services provided, as well as the jobs created. If poorly designed or insufficiently invested in, technologies could also further isolate disadvantaged persons and their families; therefore increasing their vulnerability to poverty and social exclusion. The European Union must invest in bridging the gap between social services and the fast-speed advances in technology, including in equipping staff in services to be able to make the best use of the technology.

- EU funding to support technological development in social services and to upskill staff will help to maximise the potential of new technologies for social inclusion

IV. How the current programmes/funds can add value compared to what Member States could achieve at national, regional and/or local levels?

The development of stable and sustainable support services cannot take place without suitable legal and financial frameworks. Public authorities must ensure that sufficient public funding is directed towards the funding of services assuring their availability, affordability, accessibility and high quality for users, as well as their continuity. Whereas this responsibility lies primarily at national or regional level, EU investment into social services has become essential in various areas:

1. **Innovation:** Social innovation is a key element to improve quality: allowing the dissemination of promising practices, promoting more efficient and effective intervention, to help spread this innovation across Europe, and avoiding to “re-invent the wheel” in different countries. The EU budget therefore plays an important role in spreading and upscaling social innovation, which could not be done by national and regional authorities alone; especially at a time of financial constraints.
2. **Implementation of EU policies:** An EU budget is essential to facilitate and guide the implementation of EU policies, such as the European Pillar of Social Rights or the Work-Life Balance Directive. EU funds must be made available to help implement EU policies on the ground and to fund European Civil Society Organisations, which help to bring local ownership to European policies.
3. **Achieving EU goals:** The EU has also signed several international agreements such as the Sustainable Development Goals and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (that the European Union ratified). Social services play an important role in the local implementation of such agreements. The EU needs a budget which can help to support, guide and facilitate the appropriate application of such international agreements to complement and make best use of national or regional efforts.
4. **Promoting a more positive view of the EU:** The Future of the European Union relies on making a real difference to the local needs of persons on the ground. Social services are those precisely respond to such needs and provide day-to-day solutions. The EU must therefore invest in such local solutions in order to demonstrate the added value of the European Union for all in Europe, especially those most disadvantaged. Promoting a stronger European Union means delivering what is promised in a transversal, transnational way. Indeed, if these programmes were left to local power, we might see many disparities in and inequalities between the services according to regions, which can damage the vision of a solid and unified Europe. After 10 years of economic crisis,

the EU should focus on upwards convergence again by promoting high level standards through its relevant financial programmes.

5. **Upwards social convergence:** Over the last decade, national budgets have been under severe strain leading to important cuts to social care and support, often via a reduction in the [budgets of local and regional authorities](#). The EU budget, especially its cohesion policy, quickly became a major source of investment to limit both the damage made by such cuts and divergence between different territories in Europe. As a result, EU funds have often replaced national investment in the social services sector. It is therefore crucial that the next EU budget continues to invest in such services in order to ensure upwards social convergence throughout Europe.

In conclusion, the EU budget must endow itself with an appropriate budget for social investment into social services in order to promote social innovation, implement EU policies, achieve EU goals, promote a positive view of Europe and ensure upwards social convergence.

V. The need for additional funding priorities for social services

A recent report by the High-Level Taskforce on Social Infrastructure has also highlighted an investment gap in social infrastructure of up to €150 billion per year. An appropriate mix of European Structural and Investment Funds and the future of the EU Investment Plan (i.e. [Single Investment Fund](#)) can play an important role in responding to this gap. Steps must however be taken to ensure that such instruments are targeting the specific needs of the social services sector. For the EU financial instruments, Social Services Europe recommends the next EU budget to facilitate the following four proposals:

- Creating social investment infrastructure instruments targeted to the needs of social service providers
- Funding a European Working Group on Quality Social Infrastructure, to ensure a one-stop-shop for advice, guidance and recommendations
- Funding national/regional social investment platforms, to help build a pipeline of projects and build capacity
- Data collection on social infrastructure and social investment

Additional objective to be addressed

- **EU funds should specifically address social inclusion** as an objective that is separated from active inclusion which is mainly directed to enact and enhance employment. The former should focus therefore on programmes that help include individuals at risk of social exclusion and/or currently experiencing discrimination to be part of society.

VI. How to tackle challenges and obstacles to the use of the funds for social services and ways to improve them

- **Simplification of accession and management of funds**
Often the administrative and technical burden linked to the access and the management of ESIF funds of the current programming period make their usage very difficult for smaller organisations with poorer resources and little technical administrative capacity. This prevents not only their access to the funds, but at the same time it also hinders the scaling up of innovation that is very often developed in smaller structures. It is also important to ensure that simplification is not only done for managing authorities, but also targeting the social service providers themselves. Social Services Europe supported [ten recommendations by](#)

[EASPD](#) on simplification of structural funds. These should be picked up in the new rules for the EU budget post-2020. The European Commission should also ensure that access to EU funds is not dominated by large organisations or consultancies and project calls should not only be for very large projects. On the ground knowledge and specialist expertise is essential for successful implementation and follow up, and multiple smaller projects can provide more innovations.

- ***The EU should maintain high on its agenda its leading role in pushing forward the reform of social care systems (i.e. deinstitutionalisation and transition to community-based case).***

The needed changes in social service provision towards the human rights model and an individualised and inclusive model of support require investment in infrastructures and in human capital ensuring a qualified and skilled workforce. The current structure of the ESIF funds allows to meet these objectives by combining the European Social Fund - targeting the training of human resources - with the European Regional Development Fund - which funds investment in infrastructure. This must continue.

- ***Shift from an only economic perspective to quality-effectiveness***

The provision of individualised services that can address specific needs of individuals requires financial support that takes into consideration quality elements in the delivery of the support. When quality criteria are not explicitly referred to in the requirements of the funding tool, the delivery of services could likely be taken over by cheaper providers that may compromise over quality requirements.

Also, a long-term perspective in the drafting of social policies and in funding is essential. Stable legal frameworks in funding allow long-term planning and support based on long-term objectives. Quality services are based on active and meaningful users' involvement. Tailored investment, targeting innovation in service provision, should promote and incentivise active cooperation with users through e.g. co-production methodologies.

- ***Stability and sustainability of financial frameworks***

The lack of stability not only hinders a more individualised planning of support, but also limits the possibility to build stable and durable relation with other stakeholders as well with the users which should instead become more empowered through their interaction with support services.

- ***Facilitate access to EU loans for social services***

More and more social service providers are exploring different forms of financing to develop specific social innovation and infrastructure projects. This includes access to decent loans. The aforementioned four recommendations to unlock social infrastructure investment should be implemented. It is important to ensure that the [Single Investment Fund](#) is used to invest in high quality, community-based and individualised social infrastructure projects, rather than outdated and segregating models. As such, the new MFF should ensure that ESIF conditionalities are also applied to the SIF, especially when it comes to social infrastructure.

- ***Complementarity of different funding schemes and tools***

The EU should be careful in not locking the development of the social sector by limiting its relevance in the EU agenda in only a selection of instruments. Grants will be needed for the development of the sector, but loans and public procurement schemes could complement the funding of social services by the EU funds.

- **Management of EU funding programmes eligible to support services**

The management of the future EU funds should overall address the following issues:

- i. Simplified procedures to access and to manage funds so as to open access opportunities to organisations with smaller resources and ensure thereby a more inclusive access of funds.
- ii. Promotion of social inclusion vs active inclusion
- iii. Focus on decentralised issues to better reach out to all regions and support services in Europe
- iv. Ensure more coherency in the management of the funds with common rules across DGs and funding programmes
- v. The decentralisation of funding leads to incoherent approaches in addressing topics of EU relevance
- vi. Focus on operating costs rather than unit costs which put the survival of organisations under threat.
- vii. Aim at mainstreaming the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities across different fields and areas of life

VII. Conclusion

Social services play a crucial role in the continuous development of the European social model, as well as to the EU's values, principles, rights and strategies.

Investing in social services makes Europe's economy more stable, inclusive, productive and resilient, promotes the integration and inclusion of migrants in Europe, creates new employment opportunities; promotes quality in training and education, supports rural development and allows technological support in social services.

As such, EU funding plays a key role in innovation and to the continuity in our sector and the next European Multi-Annual Financial Framework should reflect this contribution, ensuring that it continues to invest, and invest better, into quality and innovation in social services.

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