Adopted by Social Platform, 13 April 2018

EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND POST-2020

A financial tool to deliver the European Pillar of Social Rights

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Social Platform is the largest civil society alliance fighting for social justice and participatory democracy in Europe. Consisting of 48 pan-European networks of NGOs, Social Platform campaigns to ensure that EU policies are developed in partnership with the people they affect, respecting fundamental rights, promoting solidarity and improving lives.

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EU Transparency Register ID: 85083981189-35

Social Platform acknowledges the financial support of the European Commission's Europe for Citizens programme, managed by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). This publication reflects the author's views. The Commission is not liable for any use that may be made of the information contained in this publication.

KEY MESSAGES

Building on the experience of the current financial period

1. Ensure that the new ESF delivers on the European Pillar of Social Rights (hereafter referred to as "Social Pillar") by explicitly linking its thematic objectives to the principles enshrined in the Pillar.

2. Merge existing funds that already deliver on the Social Pillar, including ESF, FEAD, YEI, EaSI, while keeping the distinct aims, target groups and identity of each fund. Ensure that such combination is conducted to improve policy coherence and impact on social inclusion objectives.

People first! Social inclusion and tackling inequality needs to be a budgetary priority

3. Secure one-third of the budget to allocate adequate resources for tackling poverty and social exclusion and extend the concept of active inclusion beyond employment-related topics to implement integrated approaches based on three pillars: access to services, income support and inclusive labour market.

4. Promote accessible, quality and affordable services, supporting the development of an integrated and person-centred care and support model throughout Europe, including the transition towards community-based care in all services in all EU member states.

5. Improve funding measures towards an inclusive labour market, increase employment potential in the social economy and in social services, promote skills acquisition in employment, long-life learning and labour mobility.

6. Prioritise equal opportunities and gender equality throughout education, social inclusion and employment including the introduction of gender budgeting for all funds; establish adequate tools for the active inclusion of third country nationals in the society; promote and uphold social enterprises as a driving force for social inclusion

Ensuring key features of the funding instrument

7. Enable civil society organisations to be a full partner in all stages of the EU funding process, in order to shape decisions and policies on the basis of experiences on the ground.

8. Uphold ex-ante conditionalities as a reform catalyst in member states; remove macro-economic conditionality from funding, to avoid disincentives to productive spending and penalising funding recipients and services users for policies or situations beyond their control.

9. Simplify application and reporting procedures and harmonise the requirements among different funding tools to enable smaller stakeholders to better access funding.

Introduction

Social Platform consists of 48 European networks that together represent thousands of local and national non-governmental organisations working directly with people in vulnerable situations. Growing inequality, persisting poverty within Europe and beyond, food insecurity, resource constraints, unsustainable growth, global competition, and ageing population are key challenges of our societies. In order to reverse these trends within and among Member States we need EU leaders to commit to an adequate budget for social investments and to enable civil society to be full partners of funding programmes.

At EU institutions level, agreements are being reached to prioritize security and safety, defence and migration. However, these political priorities must not divert funds from social inclusion and appropriate social protection. The European Union is built on human rights, equality and democratic values but also because strong, inclusive and cohesive societies are the best way to build safer societies and resilient economies. To put 'people first', the EU budget must strongly contribute to tackling inequalities, bringing people together, rebuilding trust between Europeans and institutions and overcoming divisions.

Today, while solidarity and social protection are overarching priorities for about two thirds of European Citizens[1], EU social expenditure represents only 0.3% of total expenditure in the EU[2]. The newly proclaimed European Pillar of Social Rights represents a commitment to uphold social rights in a fast changing world, and secure higher social standards across the Union. To be an instrument for meaningful change, able to respond to the aftermath of the economic and financial crisis and confirming the European social model, the implementation of the Social Pillar needs to reflect a plurality of policy measures to promote quality employment, support adequate income and ensure quality, accessible and affordable services. This needs to be supported by sufficient funding, accessible to all stakeholders that commit and can be held accountable for progress made towards its implementation, including Civil Society Organisations (CSOs).

For Social Platform, the next multi-annual financial framework (MFF) is an opportunity to shift the balance of the EU budget towards people-centred policies. For this, to ensure social coherence, the EU should review instruments for social impact in areas such as health, agriculture, regional development, infrastructure and trade, which should include percentages for social impact spending. The next MFF also needs investment programmes that can specifically deliver on the Social Pillar, such as Erasmus+, Horizon 2020 and the Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) programme.

Besides, a financial tool directly aimed at supporting the implementation of the Social Pillar in all EU regions and linked to EU Semester processes should be in place. We call for this instrument to be the successor of the European Social Funds, as outlined in this paper.

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

[2] Reflection Paper on the Future of EU Finances, 28 June 2017

Building on what works in the current financial period

Link to the European Pillar of Social Rights

Key message 1: **Ensure that the European Social Fund delivers on the European Pillar of Social Rights by explicitly linking thematic objectives to the principles enshrined in the Pillar.**

To ensure that the ESF becomes an essential tool to implement the 20 principles of the Social Pillar, it is not enough to state that the Pillar is the main policy framework in which the fund should operate. The regulation of the thematic objectives should explicitly link to the relevant principles of the Social Pillar. The funding instrument will also need a better connection with the existing policy tools, such as the Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs) of the EU Semester. The Semester has a role to play in monitoring Member States' compliance with ex-ante conditionalities and their investment of EU resources for social inclusion. This will also result in a "more social" European Semester, with at least one or more recommendations on social policy per member state.
At the current stage, the EU provides for several funding tools delivering on social policies, however we identify the European Social Fund (ESF), the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD), the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) and the Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) programme as the main tools delivering the Social Pillar.

Key message 2: **Merge existing funding tools into a coordinated instrument, while protecting the specificities of European Social Fund (ESF), the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) and the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) and the Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) programme to secure specific actions addressing the most deprived, social inclusion and integration into employment.**

The future European Social Fund (ESF) could be a financial tool merged with existing funding programmes already delivering on the Pillar's objectives: the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD), the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) and the Employment and Social Innvoation (EaSI) programme. Such a merge could enhance coordination for the effective implementation of the Social Pillar, but it would have to be done with due respect to the nature, objectives and regulations of each fund and the resulting programme should keep autonomous budgets for the current ESF, FEAD, YEI and EaSI.

In terms of financial allocations, we recommend that the overall amount of the fund be equivalent to the 2014-2020 programming period allocations of ESF, FEAD, YEI and EaSI with an increased budget for the youth employment initiative, irrespective of Brexit and of new funding priorities. On this basis, we call for an overall amount of at least 143 billion €, considering both the EU balance and the national co-financing. This figure is the result of summing:

- 122 billion € (the earmarking of almost 25% of structural funds to the current ESF 2014-2020) should be continued in the next budget period.
- 4,5 billion € (the budget allocated to FEAD in the period 2014-2020), to maintain the EU support to national policies for addressing extreme deprivation.

- 16,6 billion € (doubling the current budget of 8,8 billion € for YEI), in line with the European Parliament's resolution from January 2018, which calls for a significant increase in the resources allocated to YEI in order to increase the number of unemployed youth reached by now (on average only 42 percent).
- 1 billion € for EaSI (increase from 0,92 billion € under the current ESF).

In case of a bigger budget, we stand for a minimum share of 25% of cohesion policy funds to the quota of the current European Social Fund in the next integrated funding tool. To maximize the impact of merging FEAD and ESF under a common instrument, Social Platform recommends considering some very important elements, based on the lessons learnt from the current period.

Firstly, the European Union must keep a specific funding instrument to help Member States reach out to and support the most deprived and the FEAD's identity and key added value has been its specific focus on the most deprived in the EU. This is an essential feature to protect.

Secondly, regarding social inclusion:

- The FEAD provision on accompanying measures is a fundamental feature of the current fund, in reaching out to the most deprived to help them reach inclusion. This approach must be upheld and developed, to support Member States working for social cohesion, aiming towards empowerment and self-activation of the beneficiaries.

- In the long run, a combination of, or pathways to, sustainable social inclusion approaches, including legal and fiscal advice and access to accommodation (e.g. Housing First approaches for homeless people, Counselling for over-indebted households) should be explored.

- A better integration of FEAD objectives and the current ESF objective on social inclusion should be secured.

Thirdly, the requirements for giving out food and material aid should be inclusive of the most deprived persons and independent from whether or not a person is legally registered in a MS; requirement for the beneficiary to produce an administrative certificate proving his or her eligibility must be avoided. The "low threshold" approach of the current FEAD – very low level of administrative requirements, with hardly any conditionality on the end beneficiaries – is essential to reach out to the most deprived.

Tackling inequalities as a matter of priority

One-third of ESF+ to tackle poverty and social exclusion in the new ESF

Key message 3: Secure one-third of the new ESF budget to allocate adequate resources for tackling poverty and social exclusion and extend the concept of active inclusion beyond employment-related topics to implement integrated approaches based on three pillars of access to services, income support and inclusive labour market.

While employment is a key factor for social inclusion, increasing levels of in-work poverty demonstrate that it is not a solution for all social problems. Earning a wage is not always sufficient to protect employed people from experiencing poverty and social exclusion[3]. In addition, there are people in our societies that cannot work or cannot work for part of their lives, or are simply not of working age.

For these reasons we call for the earmarking of at least one-third of the European Social Fund to measures fighting poverty and social exclusion alongside investment in employment and skills development, in order to support all vulnerable groups which are facing poverty and are excluded from the labour market. This includes persons with disabilities, homeless people, people with drug and alcohol dependency and those who need support in access to services and social protection, as well as in participating in society (e.g. families - including single parents, children, older people, migrants, ethnic minorities etc.).

To enable gradual steps out of poverty, towards participation in society and, when possible, in the labour market, the successor of the European Social Fund needs to move away from the concept of mere activation into the labour market to be able to cover active inclusion approaches beyond employment related topics based on three pillars of access to services, income support and inclusive labour market. Investment in employment and activation should therefore not be considered as falling under the objective of social inclusion but under the one on employment.

In addition, income support should become an eligible expenditure under co-funding from Member States in the ESF successor. This could be used to develop the infrastructure of adequate minimum income schemes at the national level where they have been recently introduced to improve the functioning and effectiveness of the existing systems.

Access to quality and affordable services

Key message 4: Promote accessible, quality and affordable services, supporting the development of an integrated and person-centred care model throughout Europe, including the transition towards community-based care for all services in all EU member states.

The current ESF and its successor should be used to enhance access to affordable quality services, including healthcare and social services of general interest. This priority should be continued in the future, in accord to the investment in institutional capacity and in the

[3] "EU Social Standards: Ensuring every person's fundamental right to live a life in dignity and fully participate in society", Social Platform position, June 2016

efficiency of public administrations and public services at the national, regional and local level.

This objective should support, including through policy guidance, the development of integrated and person-centred care model throughout Europe, including the transition from institutional to family and community-based care and the development of a support system based on independent living in all EU member states. Measures bearing person-centred and integrated approaches in access to health and social care, housing, language and intercultural learning, legal advice, employment support, training and education services for EU mobile citizens and non-EU migrants should be supported by the ESF successor.

The quality of service provision should be enhanced through the development of quality systems at grass-roots levels that stimulate the implementation of the European Quality Framework for social services and the European Quality Framework for early childhood education and care, to design training pathways for the workforce on specific users' needs, to design and pilot new services, to adapt existing services to the needs of specific target groups, to develop methodologies to involve users in the design, implementation and monitoring of services, and to spur innovation.

Actors interested in developing projects funded by different Structural Funds, or European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI), should be encouraged to combine funding through trainings and guidance: the combined use of different funds should be recommended to increase efficiency in projects coupling investment in social infrastructures with human capital development. Integrated projects funded through different funds should be encouraged as a tool to facilitate a holistic approach including measures such as the provision of long-term housing, related social and care services, as well as training and education. These measures are all in line with the EU's long-term strategic objectives, helping fighting poverty, social exclusion and inequalities. They can also help local service providers to develop better relationships and shorten the integration process. A successful example is the experience of Youth Guarantee linking housing to employment.

Access to quality employment and support to labour mobility

Key message 5: Improve funding measures towards an inclusive labour market, increase employment potential in the social economy and in social services, promote skills acquisition in employment, long-life learning and labour mobility.

The current ESF and YEI funding tools cover a number of measures aimed at promoting access to quality employment for all, with a particular focus on tackling long-term and youth unemployment and the development of inclusive labour markets for people who suffer from a disadvantage, face discrimination or live at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

Social Platform recommends that increased support should be given to these target groups, confirming the funding of projects to include less employable people in the labour market. Measures to improve work-life balance, including conciliation between work and care, healthy work environments, active healthy ageing in the labour market, adaptation of workforce to chance, including digitalization, future of work or transition towards a low-carbon economy, should be taken into account with regards to this priority. Skills should be updated to respond to demographic change of our societies in all relevant fields. In addition, the recognition of skills acquired in non-formal and informal settings, going beyond qualifications,

in line with the 2012 Council recommendations on the validation of non-formal and informal learning and the 2017 Council Recommendations on the European Qualification Framework for lifelong learning.

In addition, we call for a stronger support to projects aimed at the creation of jobs in sectors with employment potential which is untapped, such as care, health and social services sector, the social economy (the inclusion of disadvantaged people in the labour market and other field of activities such as the green and circular economy). This could include feasibility studies, the creation of multi-stakeholder networks aimed at job creation, training measures for final beneficiaries, including up-skilling, re-adaptation of workers or outsourcing. Measures funded under this objective should not foresee restrictions based on the workers' status (employee, worker with atypical contracts, free-lance, liberal professions). In alternative, targeted measures to one or two groups should be available for all the categories of workers.

Measures to support the creation of self-employment and entrepreneurship should be based on final beneficiaries' free choice and be conditioned to a positive assessment of beneficiaries' attitude towards self-employment and entrepreneurship by specialised professionals with adequate skills and knowledge. These measures could include support in self-discovery of strengths, legal/fiscal advice, support in the development of business plans, support in access to credit, marketing and communication activities, personalized coaching and mentoring in the first stages.

Moreover, this objective should include measures to support the modernization of labour market institutions, including the up-skilling of public employment services' staff. This should include the development of better cooperation of public employment services both with social partners and with stakeholders with expertise in addressing the needs of people with special needs, learning difficulties, or people at risk of social exclusion, poverty or discrimination.

Furthermore, this objective should focus on the support of measures for personalized support during transitions, from education to employment, transitions between jobs, outplacement, better matching of skills and labour demand, mobility or pre-retirement.

Promote and uphold social enterprises as a driving force for social inclusion

While the current approach to investing in social economy and social enterprises with the objectives of promoting social inclusion, fighting poverty and supporting the integration in the labour market should be kept, the new programming period needs to better account for a wide range of economic activities social enterprises are now present[4]. This would entail broadening the scope in the next programming period beyond the current objectives.

[4] The study of the Better Future for Social Economy can give inspiration on how to mainstream social economy and social enterprises throughout ESF+ and other ESIF

Wide priorities for the next ESI Funds

Key message 6: Prioritise equal opportunities and gender equality throughout education, social inclusion and employment including the introduction of gender budgeting for all funds; establish adequate tools for the active inclusion of third country nationals in society; promote and upheld social enterprises as a driving force for social inclusion.

With regards to the current funding tools, we identify two main crosscutting priorities which need to be preserved in the definition of all the stages of the funding process, from the preparation of the Partnership Agreements, to projects evaluation: the promotion of equal opportunities and gender equality, and the attention to measures for the integration of third country nationals. In addition, we welcome the attention to investments into the social economy and the development of social enterprises, as catalyst for social inclusion.

Prioritise equal opportunities and gender equality throughout education, social inclusion and employment

We strongly recommend keeping the general principle of promoting equality between men and women and non-discrimination throughout the preparation and implementation of programmes. The European Structural and Investment Funds shall also be used to prevent any discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation (TFEU Article 19) during the preparation and implementation of programmes. To make this effective, a percentage between 2-5% of the ESF should be earmarked to this aim in the 3 key objectives of employment, social inclusion and education. Social Platform highlights that education and training are not only key factors in enhancing employability, but also in fostering personal development, social inclusion and cohesion, and active citizenship. ESF+ should complement and not replace Member States public investment in education and training, which between 2010 and 14 fell by 2,5% in the EU as a whole; in order for education to fulfil its role in tackling unemployment, social exclusion and poverty, properly resourcing public education systems is essential.

The promotion of gender equality and equal opportunities could be the only objective of some measures, or at least one of the objectives. Moreover projects should demonstrate, when relevant, in which way they contribute to gender equality. Furthermore, we call for the introduction of gender budgeting in all EU funds to ensure that from 2020 onwards gender mainstreaming is part of the EU budgetary process from planning to monitoring and evaluation. Gender budgeting is an effective tool to promote gender mainstreaming and fight against gender inequalities. It means a gender-based assessment of budgets, incorporating a gender perspective at all levels of the budgetary process and restructuring revenues and expenditures in order to promote gender equality. Specific provisions should therefore be included in the new Common Provision Regulation (CPR) and in the new financial regulation.

Establish adequate tools for the active inclusion of third country nationals in society

Migrants' integration represents a cross-cutting issue to be part of all key social priorities in the next MFF. Emergency measures need to be addressed with an appropriate budget, however this should be assured through an additional and fully dedicated budget, ensuring that adequate resources are available to implement the EU long-term strategic objectives,

including fighting against poverty, social exclusion and inequalities. Funding to organizations and service providers supporting migrants should not be limited according to the immigration status: service providers should not have to report undocumented migrants they encounter when providing humanitarian assistance: this represents not only an additional burden on civil society, but also compromises the establishment of a trustful relation between service providers and users, justifies the division of families and leads to many errors. In cases of abuse and exploitation of undocumented migrants, systems for reporting should be developed that protect both the service provider and the undocumented migrant. In order to better ensure that services can be provided regardless the clients' status, better alignment and synergies between ESF+ and AMIF must be ensured, including by the means of coordinated calls planned in advance, to increase efficiency and impact on the ground. A combined use of different ESIF is recommended for effective integration of migrants and refugees.

Ensuring key features of the Funding Tool

Civil Society Organisations as full partner

Key message 7: Enable civil society organisations to be a full partner in all stages of the ESIF process, in order to shape decisions and policies on the basis of experiences on the ground.

Social Platform recommends the strengthening of the Partnership Principle and the code of conduct on partnerships to improve implementation of EU funding at all levels. Civil Society Organisations should be included in a meaningful way as full partners in all the stages, from the preparation of the Partnership Agreements, the operational programmes and the call for proposals, the implementation, monitoring and evaluation, including their participation in the Monitoring Committees. Decisions that affect people's lives should be made with and for people at the centre.

In order to achieve this objective, it is crucial that the Managing authorities involve all relevant stakeholders, including a diverse and comprehensive civil society in a structured and participatory dialogue and partnership, in order to shape decisions and policies on the basis of experiences on the ground[5]. People with direct experience of poverty and social exclusion, current or future beneficiaries of funding should also be taken into account at all the stages of designing, monitoring and evaluation. To strengthen the partnership principle and inclusive monitoring, the new ESF should support CSOs to be full partner in Monitoring Committees by means of technical assistance.

Annual implementation reports should be discussed in the Monitoring Committees with CSOs stakeholders, made available online for comments and make comments available to managing authorities and the European Commission, together with the reports. The partnership principle and the code of conduct on partnerships should be monitored on a yearly basis through the European Semester process: the Member States should report on how the partnership principle is implemented in the Country Reports and in the National Reform Programmes.

[5] "Civil Society Participation and Partnership: four principles for a meaningful involvement of civil society in the EU decision-making process", Social Platform position paper, December 2016

Operational grants for EU CSOs organisations should be continued under the successor of EaSI, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship program, Europe for citizens and other programs.

Ex-ante conditionalities and macroeconomic conditionalities

Key message 8: Uphold ex-ante conditionalities as a reform catalyst in member states and remove macro-economic conditionalities from funding, to avoid penalising funding recipients and services users for policies or situations beyond their control.

Uphold ex-ante conditionalities

Ex-ante conditionalities[6] (ExAC) in the current ESF represents a necessary pre-condition ensuring that suitable policy, regulatory and institutional conditions are put in place to maximise the effectiveness of the investments. The fulfilment of the ExAC should be included in the reporting of monitoring committees. In the frame of sustainable and quality employment, for instance, the existence of a strategic policy framework for promoting youth employment, including from marginalised communities or at risk of exclusion, should be a requirement for employment policies at the state level respecting the overall cohesion objectives. The general ExAC in the current European Social Fund has made a real impact in the lives of people who are among the most socially excluded, triggering changes and policy reforms that might not have happened in some Member States or have happened at a much slower pace[7]. ExAC has made it possible for example to begin reforms supporting people to transition from institutional to community-based services in Member States such as Bulgaria, Romania and Latvia. This took place even during the financial crisis when austerity measures led to serious cuts in the social protection system across Europe and when national resources for innovative changes were limited[8]. To fulfil the ExAC on the integration of marginalised Roma communities in Czech Republic, a monitoring methodology was adopted on the inclusion of Roma in education, housing, social services, employment and health services in order to measure the impact of planned substantial ESI Funds investments in these areas[9].

Remove macro-economic conditionalities

Social Platform calls for the removal of macro-economic conditionalities from funding that benefit people – such as requirements related to excessive deficits, macroeconomic imbalances. Negative social impact of austerity measures will be further exacerbated by the suspension of payments and commitments from Cohesion Funds, particularly the current Structural Funds. People in the EU under economic pressure should not be penalised for actions or situations beyond their control. These funds are the most important financial instrument for the social and economic development of the European Union. Furthermore, macro-economic conditionalities bears the risk of discouraging productive public spending in areas such as early-childhood development, health and education. This can lead to undermining investments in key areas with high social returns and as a consequence further increase divergencies between Member States.

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[6] In particular on promoting social inclusion and combating poverty, including "measures for the shift from residential to community based care", anti-discrimination, gender equality and disability

[7] Read on the European Commission's website about the value added of Ex ante conditionalities in the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI funds)

[8] See the European Expert Group on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care (EEG) response to the reflection paper on the future of EU finances, 7 September 2017

[9] European Commission Staff Working Document (SWD(2017) 127)

Simplification

Key message 9: Simplify application and reporting procedures and harmonise the requirements among different funding tools through to enable smaller stakeholders to better access funding.

In many EU Member States, increased social demand is not matched by adequate resources due to a drop in public spending compounded by growing restrictions on the activities of civil society.

Access to funding has become challenging for human-rights focused CSOs in the recent years, following the economic crisis. Among the obstacles, cumbersome access and reporting procedures, short-term project funding and negative media campaigns against CSOs that receive foreign funding[10] represent often discouraging obstacles, for smaller stakeholders active at the local level. Often the administrative and technical burden linked to the access and the management of European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), including to the ESF as key part of ESIF, of the current programming period makes their usage very difficult for smaller organisation with reduced resources and limited 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[11].
In order to allow successful access to funding to a greater plurality of CSOs actors, we recommend simplifying application and reporting procedures, increase focus of reporting to qualitative aspects including outputs and results, improve information on ESIF and call for proposals, speed-up payments, organize trainings to improve access to ESIF for beneficiaries[12].
Fewer and clearer rules for submitting applications at the national level, as well as the alignment of rules between different EU funds in the perspective of simplifying multiple applications and funding combination could allow a higher coordination in the use of funding and a better allocation of resources throughout the application and reporting process. Any simplification should make sure that ex-ante conditionalities remain unaffected, to guarantee that human rights and the rule of law are respected in the member states.

Capacity building and mutual learning

Key message 10: Enhance capacity building and mutual learning through technical assistance, transnational cooperation, good practices exchanges and the development of quality standards.

Enhance institutional capacity building for Managing Authorities

To better deliver on social cohesion and being successful, the merging of ESF, FEAD, YEI and EaSI should ensure that the current objective on "Enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration" is continued. This is important specifically for two reasons: the successor funding will not be just a labour market

[10] FRA Report: Challenges facing civil society organisations working on human rights in the EU 2018 (embargo until 18/1)
[11] EASPD Recommendations to the European Union for next Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027, the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities, March 2017
[12] See Final conclusion and recommendation of the High Level Group on Simplification for beneficiaries of ESI Funds post 2020

instrument, but also an instrument for social policy; moreover it will implement the 20 principles of the Social Pillar, therefore trainings for the Managing Authorities on how to implement the Pillar in practice should be organised and accountability mechanisms put in place. Furthermore, managing authorities should be encouraged in strengthening the engagement of civil society organisations in the allocation of ESF funding: better engagement could be enhanced by providing specific training to Member States officials and Managing Authorities staff on the added value of the involvement of civil society throughout the whole programme cycle. Another eventuality to be explored could be the exchange of good practices among Member States and Managing Authorities.

Provide adequate capacity building for civil society's stakeholders

A percentage of technical assistance should be devoted to capacity building of stakeholders delivering education, lifelong learning, training, social inclusion and employment policies, especially the ones that are less represented and have less experience in the use of ESF. Capacity building should include the development of sectoral or territorial pacts to implement policy reforms, as well as tools enabling CSOs to find co-applicants. The Commission and member states should also facilitate dissemination of good examples and of mutual learning from different actors. The use of Technical Assistance and global grants should be improved to support smaller innovative grassroots projects developed in partnership with NGOs. Collection and dissemination of good practices of the use of global grants could be delivered through technical assistance managed by NGOs.

National CSOs could be empowered through capacity building by EU CSOs having expertise: under ESF+ this could be ensured through the establishment of dedicated operational grants to EU CSOs that have the capacity to empower their national members in the use of ESF+.

Promote transnational mutual learning, good practices exchange and the development of quality standards across Member States

The aspect of transnationality, present in ESF and other programmes should be upheld and encouraged in the next ESF. Transnational applications consist in one of the most important added values of EU funding: they foster mutual learning and the development of common solutions adding values across national boundaries, through common innovative initiatives. Additionally, transnational grants promote good practices exchanges and represent a true added value of Cohesion Policy, contributing to developing quality standards (according to the European Quality in Social Services – EQUASS) across Europe. We believe for these reasons that transnational applications are a good catalyst for European integration at the professional level, and contribute to displaying the positive impact of the EU in people's everyday life.