

**European Regional Development Fund 2021-2027: Analysis of the final agreement**

Haydn Hammersley – January 2021

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# **What is the European Regional Development Fund**

The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) invests in infrastructure, innovation and research, the digital agenda, support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and the low-carbon economy. The aim is to strengthen economic and social cohesion in the European Union by correcting imbalances between its regions.

In 2018 the European Commission released its proposal for a new ERDF covering the period 2021-2027. In December 2020 an agreement was reached between the European Parliament and the Council on the final wording of the Regulation.

The European Disability Forum advocated extensively for the Regulation to include a number of provisions that would result in the Regional Development Fund being used more effectively for accessibility and deinstitutionalisation for persons with disabilities.

In this document we will analyse the final agreement on the ERDF regarding the articles we advocated on. We will explain what it could mean for persons with disabilities over the coming seven years. When presenting final text from the Regulation, all amendments to the Commission’s original proposal will be presented in bold and italic. In some cases, where text has been removed from the original proposal, words will also have a strike through.

When the final text of the Regulation is made publicly available, we will share the link on the EDF website.

## **Article 2 - Specific objectives for the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund**

Article 2 outlines the objectives for the use of this fund and the Cohesion fund. It is an article of key importance giving direction to how the money will be used in the Member States.

Two of the most crucial amendments we and our partners were able to get accepted into the text were the mention of the need to invest in “accessible infrastructure” and to invest in “promoting the transition from institutional to family- and community-based care”. These have always been the pillars of our advocacy on the ERDF and we are glad that they have been explicitly mentioned in this important article.

Alongside our partners, we also successfully advocated for the text to state that funds should be used to improve the “inclusiveness” of the labour market, meaning more money will go towards opening up job opportunities for those who are more likely to be cut of from the job market, including persons with disabilities. It also now states that the funds should focus on “high quality” employment.

We were also successful in getting a new recital added to this Article which states that “In order to promote social inclusion and combat poverty, particularly among marginalised communities, it is necessary to improve access, also through infrastructure, to social, educational, cultural and recreational services, including sports, taking into account the specific needs of persons with disabilities, children and the elderly.”

It also stresses the need for investment in an “inclusive digital society” which could pave the way for more money going towards the provision of assistive technology for persons with disabilities.

### **Article 2 final text**

1. In accordance with the policy objectives set out in Article [4(1)] of Regulation (EU) 2018/xxxx[new CPR], the ERDF shall support the following specific objectives:

(a) a **more competitive and** smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation ('PO 1') by;

***(ii) In order to grasp the opportunities from the digital age, the ERDF should contribute to the development of an inclusive digital society where citizens, research organisations, businesses and public administrations take full advantage of the opportunities digitalisation offers. Effective e-government at national, regional and local level, involves developing tools as well as rethinking organisation and processes, in order to deliver public services more effectively, easily, quickly and at a lower cost. In particular, digital and telecommunication technologies should be used to enhance traditional networks and services for the benefit of local communities through developing projects such as smart cities and villages.***

***New recital (x) Support from the ERDF under policy objective 1 should be based on building capacities for smart specialisation strategies, which set priorities at national and/or regional level to increase their competitive advantage by developing and matching research and innovation strengths with business needs and necessary skills through an entrepreneurial discovery process. The process should allow entrepreneurial actors, including industry, education and research organisations, public administrations and civil society, to identify the most promising areas for sustainable economic development based on the region's distinctive structures and knowledge base…***

(d) a more social ***and inclusive*** Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights (‘PO 4’) by;

(i) enhancing the effectiveness ***and inclusiveness*** of labour markets and access to quality employment ***through developing social infrastructure and promoting social economy;***

New recital on social economy: In order to promote social innovation ***and inclusive access to high quality employment***, the ERDF should support ‘social economy’ entities such as cooperatives, mutual societies, non-profit associations***~~, foundations~~*** and social enterprises.

(ii) improving ***equal*** access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing ***accessible*** infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training;

New recital***(x)*** ***In order to promote social inclusion and combat poverty, particularly among marginalised communities, it is necessary to improve access, also through infrastructure, to social, educational, cultural and recreational services, including sports, taking into account the specific needs of persons with disabilities, children and the elderly***

(iii) ***~~increasing~~ promoting*** the socioeconomic ***~~integration~~*** ***inclusion*** of marginalised communities,, ***~~such as Roma, migrants and disadvantaged groups, including~~*** low income households ***~~households at risk of poverty and social exclusion~~*** ***and disadvantaged groups including people with special needs***, through integrated ***~~measures~~*** ***actions*** including housing and social services;

New recital:(x) The ERDF and the Cohesion Fund should promote the socioeconomic inclusion of marginalised communities, ***with particular attention paid to the National Roma Integration Strategies*** ***~~such as Roma~~***, low-income households, including households at risk of poverty and social exclusion and disadvantaged groups including, people with special needs. In particular, in line with principle 19 of the European Pillar of Social Rights, the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund may support provision of social housing.

(iv) ensuring equal access to health care and fostering resilience of health systems, ***including primary care, and promoting the transition from institutional to family- and community-based care;***

(e) a Europe closer to citizens by fostering the sustainable and integrated development of ***all types of territories ~~urban, rural and coastal areas~~*** and local initiatives ('PO 5') by:

(ii) fostering the integrated ***and inclusive*** social, economic and environmental local development, ***culture, natural ~~cultural~~*** heritage**, sustainable tourism** and security, ***~~including for rural and coastal~~*** ***in*** areas ***other than urban areas*** ***~~also through community-led local development~~***.

## **Article 6 - Exclusion from the scope of the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund**

Article 6 was one of the key areas of EDF’s advocacy on the ERDF. One of the biggest issues we have seen with the use of funds over previous funding periods is that money is still invested in renovating and building institutions for persons with disabilities. In this article on what is excluded from the scope of the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund, alongside our partner organisations in the European Expert Group on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care, we were successful in having a new recital introduced. This recital states that the ERDF should support deinstitutionalisation, prevent funding segregated living conditions and seek to ensure independent living conditions.

### **Article 6 final text**

***new recital (x) The ERDF should support and promote transition from institutional to community or family-based care through supporting facilities that would seek to prevent segregation from the community, would facilitate the integration of people to the society and would seek to ensure independent living conditions.***

## **Article 10 European Urban Initiative**

Article 10 on the European Urban Initiative, a crucial area with regards to accessibility of the built environment, now contains a new section. This section explains the composition of the group of experts and states that this group should include civil society bodies. Since this article deals with sustainable urban development, the text gives organisations of persons with disabilities a good foothold to request their inclusion in the expert group, with the aim of providing expertise on accessibility of the built environment for persons with disabilities.

### **Article 10 final text**

***6. In its work, the Commission shall be supported by a group of experts. The expert group shall be composed of representatives from Member States, regional authorities and cities, representatives of business, research and civil society bodies. The composition of the expert group shall aim to ensure gender balance. The expert group shall support the Commission in defining a long-term work programme and in preparing calls for proposals.***

**Contact:** Haydn Hammersley - EDF Social Policy Officer - [haydn.hammersley@edf-feph.org](mailto:haydn.hammersley@edf-feph.org)



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