



Social Services Europe



socialplatform

Brussels, 30th September 2016

REF: Structured Dialogue on Suspension of ESIF for Portugal and Spain

Dear Members of the European Parliament,

We are writing to you regarding the Structured Dialogue with Vice President Mr Jyrki Katainen and Commissioner Ms Corina Cretu on 3rd October. The meeting will focus on the European Commission's upcoming proposal to suspend part of the 2017 commitments for the European Structural and Investment Funds in Portugal and Spain.

We understand that the European Commission must respect and apply law approved by European co-legislators. Whilst the European Commission is legally obliged to propose a suspension of European Structural and Investment Funds, it can also make use of discretionary powers to ensure that the suspension 'take(s) into account the economic and social circumstances of the Member State concerned'. In addition, the provisions add that "the impact of suspensions on programmes of critical importance to address adverse economic or social conditions shall be a specific factor to be taken into account" towards the exclusion of certain funds or programmes.

Both Portugal and Spain have made significant efforts the last few years towards ensuring that they fall in line with provisions set in the Stability and Growth Pact. This has led to significant cuts in public funding towards social expenditure in these countries; placing additional pressure on many organisations to provide quality support and care for the most disadvantaged at a time when demand for such services have been increasing.

European Structural and Investment Funds have thus become increasingly important for the provision of social services and measures to combat poverty and social exclusions in these two countries, where these funds account for 78% of national public investment in Portugal and 21% in Spain (in some regions up to 80%) between 2014-2016. This is particularly the case for the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund.

Many of our members in Portugal and Spain have spoken to us of their alarm of the tremendous impact a suspension of these funds in 2017 may have on the development of their core activities in the future; which include the funding of employment support for disadvantaged groups, inclusive education measures, integration projects and quality social care among many others.

According to those working on the ground in our communities, it is not an overstatement to say that a suspension of funds can compromise the continuity of the entire Portuguese and Spanish social support system, the backbone of our societies; with a disproportionate impact on society's most disadvantaged groups. Following years of tightened public investment towards the social sector, in part due to the

Stability and Growth Pact, a suspension of Structural Funds in these countries would effectively be imposing a double penalty on local communities; with impending consequences for social cohesion.

In the structured dialogue, **we call on you to strongly voice these concerns** and help to ensure that the European Commission excludes from the suspension all possible programmes which are essential to human rights enjoyment, labour market integration and social inclusion for many in Portugal and Spain.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Luk Zelderloo, Secretary General, European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities

Mr Pierre Baussand, Director, Social Platform

Mr Freek Spinnewijn, President, Social Services Europe