



Position on the European Commission Proposal for the Next Multiannual Financial Framework (2028–2032)

Hope and Homes for Children works to eliminate institutional care globally and ensure that all institutionalised children are back to safe and loving families. EU funding has played a decisive role in supporting this transition in both Member States and candidate and partner countries.

At a moment when official development assistance is under pressure and human-rights priorities are being sidelined in many aid programmes, the European Union must choose to lead, not lag. The 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) presents a rare, strategic opportunity for the EU to redouble its moral and financial commitments to the most at-risk children and communities, among which children deprived of family care, their families and communities, are amongst the most vulnerable. This is especially timely, as a the momentum for the global movement around child protection and care reform is rising with the recent launch of the Global Charter on Children’s Care Reform.¹ The Commission’s proposal for the 2028–2034 MFF introduces a new architecture with greater flexibility, simplification and coherence between internal and external action. However, the removal of key safeguards risks reversing decades of progress.

Our priorities are to ensure EU funds remain a driver of the transition from institutional to family- and community-based care, that all children have access to basic services and vulnerable families get the support they need to be able to take care of their children. We urge the EU, in the lead up to the adoption of the 2028-2034 MFF, to renew commitments to supporting deinstitutionalisation and child care and protection systems, domestically and in partner countries, safeguard child protection, and steer resources towards family- and community-based solutions. Bold, targeted funding and unambiguous safeguards would not only protect Europe’s values abroad but set a powerful international example that principled, rights-centred aid is both possible and essential.

Internal Funding Instruments

Hope and Homes for Children welcomes:

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/global-charter-on-childrens-care-reform/global-charter-on-childrens-care-reform>

A rights-based approach

- Compliance with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU and the principles of the rule of law (Fund Regulation, Arts. 7, 8, 9, 56).
- Explicit prohibition of EU support for segregation and obligation to respect the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (ERDF Regulation, Recital 5; Budget Expenditure Tracking Regulation, Recital 10).

Commitments to social inclusion and children

- Social inclusion recognised as a General Objective (Fund Regulation, Art. 2(1b)).
- Specific Objective to facilitate access to services, including child and long-term care services (Fund Regulation, Art. 3(1)(c)(iv)).
- Requirement for Member States to programme ESF resources for the European Child Guarantee (ESF Regulation, Recital 20).

Funding guarantees

- At least 14% of the financial envelope ringfenced for social objectives (Fund Regulation, Art. 10(5)).
- Commitment to affordable, high-quality services such as early childhood education, healthcare, and particularly family- and community-based care (ESF Regulation, Recital 15).
- Targeting of child poverty, marginalised groups (including Roma), the working poor and the most deprived (ESF Regulation, Recital 16).

Partnership and civil society participation

- Continuation of the Partnership Principle, with explicit reference to the European Code of Conduct on Partnership (Fund Regulation, Art. 6 (6)).
- Participation of civil society and fundamental rights bodies in monitoring committees (Fund Regulation, Art. 55 (1)).
- Requirement for the Member States to organise and implement a comprehensive partnership around the NRP Plan and Interreg Plan, including civil society representatives (Fund Regulation, Art. 6 (1)(c))
- Inclusion of civil society and fundamental rights bodies in monitoring committees (Fund Regulation, Art. 55).
- Annual consultations of the Commission and organisations representing partners at EU level (Fund Regulation, Art. 6 (6))

Alignment with EU social priorities

- Explicit reference to the European Pillar of Social Rights as a guiding framework (ESF Regulation, Recital 19).
- Promotion of independent living and the transition from institutional to family- and community-based care (Budget Expenditure Tracking Regulation, Recital 10).

Hope and Homes for Children has identified the following shortages in the European Commission proposals:

Removal of enabling conditions

- Previous ex-ante conditionalities and current enabling conditions prevented EU funds from reinforcing institutional care. Their removal risks new investments in institutional models.

Loss of earmarking for children and social inclusion

- The absence of earmarking may divert funds away from children and families towards general infrastructure, undermining progress in social rights.

Insufficient visibility of children

- Children appear mainly under poverty objectives, with no comprehensive reference to child protection or and only one mentioning family-based care services across Regulations. This undermines the European Child Guarantee and risks perpetuating cycles of disadvantage.

External Funding Instruments (Global Europe Regulation)

Hope and Homes for Children values the following commitments in the proposed **Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI)**:

- Actions under the instrument to apply a human rights-based approach encompassing all human rights That approach shall be guided by the principles of ‘leaving no one behind’, equality, non-discrimination on any grounds, including towards persons with disabilities. (Global Europe Regulation, Art. 9(4))
- Particular attention to the rights of the child and to the protection and empowerment of youth (Global Europe Regulation, Art. 9(5))
- Requirement to support children and youth as key agents of change, giving particular attention to their needs and empowerment (Global Europe Regulation, Recital 48)
- Implementation in full accordance with the Union commitment to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of all human rights (Global Europe Regulation, Art. 9(6))

- Timely and accessible consultation with relevant stakeholders of partner countries, including civil society organisations allowing them to play a meaningful role during the design, implementation and associated monitoring processes (Global Europe Regulation, Art. 9(9), Art. 14 (1)(a)).
- Requirement for the Commission to exchange information on a regular basis with civil society within the Union (Global Europe Regulation, Art. 9(10)).
- Dedicated funding for Ukraine (Global Europe Regulation, Art. 6(2)).
- Conditionality for accession countries, requiring alignment with the EU acquis, fundamental rights and rule of law (Global Europe Regulation, Recital 17, Recital 88, Art. 23 (6)).
- Explicit reference to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDG framework in the General Objectives and throughout the Instrument (Global Europe Regulation, Art. 4(b)).

Hope and Homes for Children has identified the following shortages in the European Commission proposals:

- **Weak external action safeguards:** Unlike previous instruments, the proposal removes thematic programmes with explicit reference to the transition from institutional to community-based care, reducing leverage for reform in accession, neighbourhood and partner countries.
- **Lack of operational safeguards against segregation:** While references to the Charter and UN CRPD are retained, there is no binding operational requirement to prioritise family- and community-based care.
- **Insufficient visibility of children and their rights.**

Key asks

To ensure the MFF 2028–2032 delivers on the EU’s values and commitments, we call on the European Parliament and Council to:

1. **Reintroduce horizontal and thematic enabling conditions** in the internal funding regulations, aligned with the European Pillar of Social Rights, and requiring a national strategic framework for social inclusion and poverty reduction, including the transition from institutional to family- and community-based care, and preventative measures to support families at risk.
2. **Restore child poverty earmarking** for children and social inclusion within the National and Regional Partnership Plans, matching the current 5% ESF+ requirement and scaled up to 10% for countries with higher child poverty rates to safeguard dedicated investment.

3. **Require clear commitments** from enlargement countries to develop national plans for the ECG, including child protection and care reform, as a condition for receiving EU funds and technical support.
4. **Ringfence a dedicated, transparent tranche for family- and community-based care within both internal (at least 25% of allocations for social inclusion) and external instruments.** Establish a labelled line-item (with public reporting) to ensure funds reach prevention, family support, alternative family care, social work capacity and community services, not solely bricks and mortar institutions.
5. **Strengthen references to children’s rights** across all Regulations and ensure that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) are applied with the same weight as rule-of-law conditionality, backed up with adequate programmes and funding.
6. **Maintain Global Europe commitments** to Ukraine, accession conditionalities, and the SDG framework, while explicitly addressing the transition from institutional to family and community-based care.
7. **Ensure robust procedures** for the implementation of the Partnership Principle with inclusive, accessible and transparent participation protocols throughout design, planning, oversight and implementation, including of children and youngsters with lived-in experience.

Contact

Internal action and EU accession

Irina Papancheva, Senior EU Advocacy Lead
irina.papancheva@hopeandhomes.org

External action (excluding EU accession)

Marie Raverdeau, Advocacy Adviser:
marie.raverdeau@hopeandhomes.org