Time for decisive investments in care services:

Call for earmarking of funds for implementation of European Care Strategy under the MFF 2028-2034

The European Care Alliance - which has supported implementation of the European Care Strategy since its inception - calls on the EU legislators to clearly earmark funding for social and care policies under the next 7-year EU budget (2028-2034). Namely through explicit mention of the European Care Strategy in the NRP regulation and European Social Fund regulation, and through greater clarity in the MFF package on allocation of funding for social and care objectives.

On 16th July 2025, the European Commission presented its proposal for an ambitious and dynamic Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), amounting to almost EUR 2 trillion (or 1.26% of the EU's gross national income on average between 2028 and 2034). This framework aims to equip Europe with a long-term investment budget matching its ambitions to be an independent, prosperous, secure, and thriving society and economy over the coming decade. It includes funds to help deliver on the European Semester and the European Pillar of Social Rights.

The proposed future EU cohesion funds management - moving from 500+ programmes today to 27 National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRP) under the next EU budget – with a proposed total envelope of around EUR 865 billion, will potentially lead to a reduction of the overall social funding available compared to the previous EU financial framework,[1] and to less direct links between the EU budget and local/regional communities. This change may lead to a bigger divide between Europe and its citizens, making it *essential* to entrench strong legal requirements to ensure the effectiveness of the partnership principle and a sound multi-level governance of the NRP plans. The current proposal includes the obligation to involve civil society organisations and social partners for the development and monitoring of the NRP plans, alongside national and regional authorities. This provision should be robustly safeguarded and fully applied.

[1] EU budget 2028-2034: Overview of the Commission's proposal | Think Tank | European Parliament

The European Care Alliance - a group of civil society organisations and social economy organisations representing and supporting persons with disabilities, persons in need of care, and their families, service providers in the long-term care sector, health and social partners - is concerned about this new architecture for the future EU budget. To ensure that care receivers and care givers are not left behind in this "nationalisation" of the future EU budget, we call on the EU institutions to incorporate the ambitions of the European Care Strategy into the financial planning for 2028-2034, through three main actions.

1. Tracking and performance framework: One of the regulations proposed in the MFF package establishes a budget expenditure tracking and performance framework mainly based on a single list of intervention fields with output and result performance indicators associated with each intervention field. The list of intervention fields and performance indicators includes a number of indicators which cover early childhood education and care, families in migration, family reunification, long-term care and family/community-based care services, tackling child poverty, and improving access of persons with disabilities to education and employment. These are all relevant fields for the European Care Alliance.

What is missing however is a set of specific indicators aligned with the objectives of the European Care Strategy - including in terms of adequacy, availability and quality of service provision - as well as the explicit mention of indicators related to formal and informal/family carers[2], aimed at recognising them, alongside care service users, as targets of EU support for the tracking and performance framework. This is especially relevant to measure progress of the implementation of the 2022 Council Recommendation on Long-Term Care. We call on the EU institutions to include these dimensions in the definitions of intervention fields 469 and 481 on Long-Term Care.

2.Horizontal NRP Regulation: The proposal for a regulation establishing the European Fund for economic, social and territorial cohesion, agriculture and rural, fisheries and maritime, prosperity and security referred to as the "NRP regulation" highlights that the future NRP Plans must be in line with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. We welcome the allocation of *at least* 14% of the total EU contribution and loans to achieving the Union's social objectives (Article 22). We note that the Annex VI to the NRP regulation provides guidelines for allocation of targeted financial resources to the European Child Guarantee and the European Youth Guarantee. However, the European Care Strategy, another important framework under the European Pillar of Social Rights, is not explicitly mentioned.

We call on the EU institutions to include a clear reference in Annex VI to the European Care Strategy. Moreover, the NRP regulation should be clearer about the amounts of the MFF allocated to social and care policies and how the "at least 14%" of the NRPs will be allocated to social objectives in practice.

[2] Based on the definition in the 2022 Council Recommendation on access to affordable high-quality long-term care, which states the following: *'informal care' means long-term care provided by an informal carer, namely someone in the social environment of the person in need of care, including a partner, child, parent or other person, who is not hired as a professional long-term care worker.*

3.European Social Fund. Different EU funds can contribute to providing support to care receivers and care givers, to support care service infrastructure, rolling out services in urban and rural areas, and boosting skills and training of care service staff. The European Social Fund is a key fund in this respect. The European Social Fund proposal refers to facilitating access to care services like long-term care, early childhood education and care, and family/community-based care. Its Article 5 on support for the demographic transition explicitly calls for national action: "Member States and regions shall, where appropriate, set out an integrated approach to addressing challenges stemming from the demographic transition in one or more dedicated chapters of the National Regional and Partnership Plan."

The European Care Strategy should be explicitly mentioned in this regulation under Article 5, as it is a crucial tool for supporting the demographic transition, as stated in the 2022 Commission Communication on the European Care Strategy: "This strategy is a cornerstone of the EU's approach to social policies to help adapt to demographic change, eliminate persistent gender and other inequalities, tap into the potential of the green and digital transitions, and increase resilience to significant external shocks."

List of signatories:

AGE Platform Europe
Alzheimer Europe
Autism Europe
Caritas Europa
CECOP – European confederation of industrial and service cooperatives
COFACE Families Europe
Eurocarers
Eurodiaconia
EAPN – European-Anti Poverty Network
EASPD – European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities
EFFE – European Federation for Family Employment and Home Care
EFSI – European Federation for Services to Individuals
EPSU – European Public Service Unions
Make Mothers Matter
Mental Health Europe