

# ESF+ TOOLKIT

**MOBILISING EUROPEAN FUNDS  
TO PREVENT AND COMBAT YOUTH  
HOMELESSNESS**



# INTRODUCTION

The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) comprises *EUR 88 billion* in funds. The European funds are intended to be used to fight social exclusion in Europe, and it is a system which the European Commission uses to invest in people. The ESF+ has a multi-year programme, running from 2021 to 2027, under which there are many opportunities to mobilise the funds around preventing and combatting youth homelessness.

There are many fantastic examples in the past of ESF funds being used to combat homelessness, which have been showcased by the FEANTSA Ending Homelessness Awards. However, few projects have focussed on youth homelessness. In the current climate the European Commission has made youth a priority of the ESF+.

This toolkit provides an overview of some of the key factors to keep in mind if you are interested in putting together an ESF project.

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# BACKGROUND

The ESF+ has a broad set of goals which includes:

- 1. improving employment opportunities for workers in the European Union
- 2. raising the standard of living
- 3. contributing towards economic, social and territorial cohesion

However, in the current period, there are more defined goals for the funds.

The European Commission intends to use the ESF+ to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights. The Pillar, under principle 19, provides a commitment to combat homelessness in Europe. For the 2021-2027 programme period the fund has four thematic concentrations of which two relate closely to combatting youth homelessness.

- 1. **Combatting Social Inequalities and poverty:** 25% of the ESF+ should be used to promote social inclusion in each Member State. Additionally, 3% is required to be used around assistance to combat material deprivation, which includes homelessness.
- 2. **Youth Unemployment:** since the 2008 economic crisis youth unemployment has remained high across Europe and has further increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. All Member States must allocate an appropriate amount of their ESF+ resources to projects and structural reforms in support of youth employment, this includes projects aimed at bringing youth back into training and education, and outreach to vulnerable or marginalised youth.

Given that youth homelessness is on the rise in most EU countries, there is ample room to use funds to support projects designed for youth experiencing homelessness. Additionally, many youth experiencing homelessness are disconnected from education, training and employment. The ESF+ thus provides an opportunity for homeless services to use the funds to develop projects on youth homelessness.

# ESF + STRUCTURE

The new ESF+ combines four previously distinct funding streams, together, these funds represent EUR88 billion for the 2021-2027 programming period.

- European Social Fund (ESF)
- Youth Employment Initiative (YEI)
- Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD)
- European Programme for Employment & Social Innovation (EASI)

The ESF, YEI & FEAD operate under a structure of shared management and EASI operates under direct management. Direct management means the European Commission is responsible for managing the fund.

Shared management is a more complicated system, where both the European Commission and Member States manage the fund. This means that the priorities for the ESF+ is jointly agreed by representatives of the Member States and the European Commission.

The European Commission is responsible for monitoring the overall implementation of the fund across Europe, reimbursing expenditure and is accountable for managing the fund's budget.

Member States are then responsible for ensuring the delivery of planned actions, selecting concrete projects in their country, drafting national calls for funding and managing the payments to project organisers. The work of the Member States is often led through a managing authority for the fund in the Member State. You can find out more information about the managing authority in your country [here](#).

The fund is co-financed by both the Member States and the European Commission. Generally, 50% of the funds are covered by the European Commission, 40-45% is provided by the Member State with the remaining coming from private contributions of the project organisers.

# PRIORITIES FOR FUNDING

## SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THE ESF+ 2021–2027

The ESF+ will only be used to fund projects which align with the specific objectives of the current programming period which include:

- Improving access to employment and activation measures for all jobseekers, in particular young people, especially through the implementation of the Youth Guarantee, for long-term unemployed and disadvantaged groups on the labour market.
- Promoting equal access to and completion of quality and inclusive education and training in particular for disadvantaged groups, from early childhood education and care through general and vocational education and training to tertiary level.
- Fostering active inclusion with the view of promoting equal opportunities, non-discrimination and active participation, as well as improving employability, in particular for disadvantaged groups.
- Enhancing equal and timely access to quality, sustainable and affordable services, including services that promote the access to housing and person-centred care including healthcare, modernising social protection systems, including promoting access to social protection, with a particular focus on children and disadvantaged groups.
- Promoting social integration of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, including the most deprived persons and children.

## YOUTH EMPLOYMENT INITIATIVE & YOUTH GUARANTEE

Due to increasing levels of unemployment and social exclusion of young people, there is an additional obligation on certain Member States to spend a minimum of 12.5% of their ESF+ resources to targeted actions and reforms to support youth employment and reintegration into education or training, which will be facilitated through a renewed Youth Guarantee scheme. This obligation is in place for countries where young people not in education, employment, training (NEETS) exceeds the EU average. This includes Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Slovakia and Spain.

All other Member States are requested to allocate an appropriate amount of money towards the integration of youth back to education, employment & training. The regulation which underpins the ESF+ specifically highlights the urgency for the measures related to youth and supporting disadvantaged youth, including those living in poverty or who are vulnerable.

## SOCIAL INCLUSION

All Member States are obligated to allocate 25% of their ESF+ resources towards social inclusion. This includes socio-economic integration of third country nationals and marginalised communities, equal access to services, modernisation of an access to social protection systems and the social integration of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion. A further 3% should also be used for addressing material deprivation.

The regulation setting out the ESF+ specifically highlights homelessness as a form of material deprivation the funds should be targeted towards addressing. The regulation further highlights that the ESF+ should be used to increase access to affordable housing, with person-centred approaches and support for the integration of people experiencing homelessness.

The efficacy of funds is also measured by the use of output indicators: assisting and supporting people experiencing homelessness and/or living in housing exclusion is also listed as a key indicator.

## PART B: INSPIRING PRACTICES AND POTENTIAL PROJECTS

Although there is a lot of opportunities to use European funds to support programmes that are designed for young people experiencing homelessness, there hasn't been an uptake on the use to date. This section highlights one case study of a previous ESF project focused on youth homelessness. The following section includes some existing practices for combatting youth homelessness which would fit within the priorities of the 2021-2027 programming period.

### INSPIRING PRACTICES



#### A HOME THAT FITS HELSINKI, FINLAND

"A Home That Fits" was a youth homeless project financed by European Social Fund between 2015-2018. The project received EUR75,000 from the ESF.

The goal of "A Home that Fits" was to provide young people in Helsinki with a place to call home. With a relatively small budget, The Helsinki City Youth Department decided to look for existing places that would allow young people (18 to 25-year-olds) to be housed. They came up with five solutions: communal housing, living with the elderly, seasonal housing combined with a summer job, housing combined with working for the neighbourhood and a digital platform combining housing, work and social interaction.

The Helsinki City Youth Department works in close cooperation with other actors in the housing field and encourages their young beneficiaries to take an active role in the project.

"A Home that Fits" has not gone unnoticed in Finish media. It has successfully contributed to changing the narrative about young homeless people. Through interaction with the elderly or others via part-time jobs or volunteering work, young homeless people can prove they are able and trustworthy. The method itself, using retirement homes, empty villas or private properties as housing for youth is now widely discussed as a solution for other homeless services. Foreign media have picked up the project as well, leading to a city in Sweden to adopt a similar project which will start soon. The project has stimulated creative thinking, policy debate and experimentation on addressing youth homelessness.



# POTENTIAL PROJECTS

## EDUCATION & EMPLOYMENT



### PETE (PREPARING FOR EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT),

#### FOCUS IRELAND

PETE is delivered by Focus Ireland. It is designed especially for people experiencing homelessness, or at risk of becoming homeless. The service was designed for people experiencing homelessness who face barriers in accessing employment as well as upskilling, education and training.

There are different ways of engaging with the services, for example it partners with a local Housing First for Youth service as part of its social and community integration stream of services. Additionally, other homeless services can refer young people to this service if they are looking to engage in education, training or employment. Thirdly, the service accepts self-referrals where young people engage from word of mouth of others who have previously used this service.

Young people accessing this service start with dropping into the Fhou and have an informal conversation over a cup of tea with the service. This helps to identify what the young person wants to get out of PETE and set realistic goals for both the young person and the service. The majority of young people are focussed on improving their employability. When they first join, they tend to be highly motivated and eager to progress.

Young people go through an informal education assessment to take stock of existing qualifications and soft skills or formal qualifications to identify what their next steps could be. For formal training and qualification programmes, PETE supports young people to access courses offered by other organisations within the community. PETE offers courses around soft skills such as art, cookery and horticulture or interpersonal, communication skills and conflict management. These courses also engage young people back into education and help them readjust to a classroom setting.

While the service is focussed on education, training and employment, it is built in a youth-oriented way, and upon the principles of Psychologically Informed Environments. The service recognises that many young people experiencing homelessness have suffered trauma, and as such put the young person and their needs first, allowing for education to be flexible and to meet young people at their level. PETE isn't just about education for the sake of having a qualification, it uses education and training as a gateway to regaining independence and supporting young people to become involved in their community.

## HOUSING



### HOUSING FIRST FOR YOUTH, LIMOR NETHERLANDS

Young people are referred to the Housing First for Youth service through the local authority. The city of The Hague has a central service that young people report to when experiencing homelessness. This service links with outreach and youth teams to support youth in accessing the different social services in the city. The service examines the different referrals to decide, based on the needs, what services best match the young person's situation.

The available services include transitional housing, supported housing or Housing First for Youth. This project includes 35 independent apartments that are scattered across the city, having started with 10 apartments in 2018. The target group of this service is 16 to 24-year-olds, however this is a general framework the service developed to help make strategic decisions. Most clients are 18 or above but in certain situations Housing First For Youth works for youth aged 16. It is important to note this service does not have a hard cut off point. If a person in the service is turning 25, they are not kicked out, and can stay for as long as they need support, in line with Housing First for Youth core principles.

The wrap around supports provided to the clients are designed to meet the daily needs and challenges that young people may face. The service helps support youth back into education and training. There are additional services around relationship-building. While the service does not have expertise for every challenge a young person may face they can support the youth to access other support services such as legal services, debt counselling or mental health services. This Housing First for Youth project is supported with a peer worker who is also a support worker. This role helps bring an important perspective from someone with lived experience. Young people like being able to work with someone who has been in their shoes and can understand their situation better. The peer worker also helps engage young people with the service. There are 5 clients for each full-time support worker, allowing for plenty of time and flexibility to support the young people as needs arise.

## PREVENTION



### UPSTREAM, LLAMAU WALES

Upstream Cymru aims to identify young people at risk of homelessness at an earlier instance, before the young person enters a crisis period. This is modelled on an Australian approach which is being rolled out in Canada and plans to be rolled out in Belgium. Once identified, the service allows for support staff (including family mediators) to provide a targeted intervention at a sufficiently early point to prevent a situation deteriorating into homelessness.

Upstream runs a universal survey in high schools (beginning with 14 and 15-year-olds in the first year of delivery but ultimately aiming to cover the whole school) which features questions about housing, general resilience, school engagement, conflict at home and mental wellbeing and other questions which identify risk factors for youth potentially at risk of homelessness. The questions are similar to those used in versions of the Upstream model implemented in North America and Australia. Working with young people, the questions were refined for the Welsh context and to ensure they were accessible for young people. The surveys are completed on an app and it typically takes a young person about 30 minutes to fully complete the survey.

Fundamental to the approach's success is the universal way in which the survey is applied as it asks every young person to complete the survey, rather than using pre-existing data or staff intuition to identify young people who could be asked to take it. The model enables those who are not already known to other services to be identified, such as young people for whom school is a haven from trouble at home and who are not recognised by school staff as needing help. Young people are given a username which is accessible to Upstream Cymru, however the data to match the usernames to the names of the participants is kept within the school.

The data gathered by Upstream Cymru is anonymised with no personal indicators. If a young person's results indicate risk factors for a future experience of homelessness then this is flagged to the school, who can match the username to the specific young person. Then, Upstream Cymru team members work with the school to understand what supports the young person currently has in place and identifies any additional supports the young person may require.

Upstream Cymru can provide family mediation services, which focus on communication and conflict resolution skills to support the young person and their parents to improve their relationship.

Alternatively, Upstream Cymru can provide a social worker, from Llamau's EMPHASIS team, who will focus on re-engaging a young person with education. The innovation in this service is not the specific supports put in place, which are tried-and-tested, but rather the early indication of concerns, which allows interventions to be made before a young person's problems become insurmountable.

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Published by FEANTSA December 2022.

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"Co-funded by the European Union- By the EaSI strand of the ESF+ programme. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them."