

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **For immediate use**

#### **Vital community projects threatened by Brexit, campaigners warn.**

The Government must act to protect hundreds of EU-funded projects that reduce inequality and injustice, a report published today warns.

Over £5.4 billion of the UK funds contributed by The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF) between 2014 – 2020 will go to projects with a particularly strong emphasis on equality and inclusion, helping people tackle disadvantage and discrimination, increase skills and get into work.

Today's report by the Equality and Diversity Forum urges ministers to commit to replacement schemes with a similar focus on supporting disadvantaged communities and no loss of funding.

The report also highlights the importance of replacing the separate Rights, Equality and Citizenship (REC) programme, which supports projects which combat violence against women and children, hate crime, discrimination, and exploitation at work.

Chief executive of the Equality and Diversity Forum Ali Harris said:

"We welcome the government's commitment to replacing some of the EU's funding streams with a new Shared Prosperity Fund, and to consulting on it.

"Brexit offers a real opportunity to design a fund that combines economic activity with an anti-discrimination agenda so that we create truly shared prosperity and inclusive growth. It's crucial that any replacement schemes continue to invest at current levels or more, and continue to target groups facing disadvantage. It's also vital we don't see a reduction or loss of projects supporting people facing violence, abuse or exploitation.

"The European Union has provided vital funding for projects that have helped challenge injustice. Post-Brexit, the UK will need the economic benefits that those projects deliver, alongside the social good that they do."

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The Government has said it will honour ESF and ERDF commitments for projects agreed to 2020 – if they represent value for money and align with 'domestic priorities' which it has yet to identify. It has also not set out funding levels for the new Shared Prosperity Fund.

The report highlights other funding streams that help secure human rights including the PEACE fund, an EU initiative which has tackled sectarianism and promoted the peace process in Northern Ireland since 1995.

The report's other recommendations include:

- The commitments to social inclusion, equality of opportunity and gender mainstreaming in the EU funds should be mirrored in the post-Brexit arrangements.
- Future funding arrangements must ensure the application, monitoring and reporting requirements are proportionate and do not deter smaller and local organisations from applying.
- The Government should analyse the databases of EU funding programmes to identify projects that include a focus on equality and human rights and to assess need.
- Decisions about the 'domestic priorities' that will shape funding should be underpinned by equality and human rights principles and take account of priorities in the devolved administrations.
- The Government should work with the voluntary and community sector to improve equality data gathered from projects funded by the EU programmes and their domestic successors.

Ali Harris added:

"As well as committing to no reduction in the EU's funding levels, the Government should streamline the overly-bureaucratic application and monitoring processes that deter many smaller organisations from applying to the current funds.

We need longer term funding options and systems and approaches that support local and grassroots work. That is how we will improve the effectiveness of interventions and deliver inclusive benefits to people, the communities they live in and the wider economy."

## **Ends**

### **Notes to editors:**

The Equality and Diversity Forum (EDF) is a national network of organisations, working across all areas of equality and human rights.

Copies of the report 'Shared Prosperity, Shared Rights: replacing EU funding for equality and human rights after Brexit' are available for download from [edf.org.uk/sharedprosperity](http://edf.org.uk/sharedprosperity).