

Member of the European Parliament

Frans Timmermans,
First Vice-President, Better Regulation, Inter-Institutional Relations, the Rule of Law and
the Charter of Fundamental Rights,
European Commission,
Rue de la Loi 200,
1049 Brussels.

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Dear First Vice-President,

I would like to draw your attention to a serious problem which is threatening the lives of millions of children in Europe and the world – institutionalisation.

There are eight million children currently living in institutions around the world. More than 90% of them have living parents. The reasons for being separated from their families are often related to poverty, discrimination, disability or the lack of community-based services, which support vulnerable families.

Living in an institution is harmful for children for a number of reasons. The lack of individual love, care and attention means they do not thrive and the emotional and psychological harm can last a lifetime. There is also evidence that institutional care, especially in early life, is detrimental to all areas of child development and that it predisposes children to intellectual, behavioural and social problems later in life. It indicates that in children under three, institutionalisation is likely to negatively impact brain functioning during the most critical period of brain development, leaving long-lasting effects on a child's social and emotional behaviour. It is no wonder that later on in life these children are 10 times more likely than their peers to be involved in prostitution or to be trafficked; 40 times more likely to have a criminal record; and 500 times more likely to commit suicide.

It is essential that the new Commission work for enhancing social justice in the EU and not only the economic sustainability.

In the past, European Structural Funds have been used to renovate existing institutions and build new ones, prolonging this outdated and harmful practice. However last year Regulation 1303/2013 introduced for the first time ex-ante conditionalities which are key criteria that must be applied to all funding one of which focuses on social inclusion (9: 9.1.). The Investment priorities under this ex-ante conditionality include ***"...the transition from institutional to community-based services."***

The adoption of the Regulation was a significant step forward to ensure all children within the EU will be able to grow up in a family setting or in community-based care. However other EU funds invested outside of the Union, such as the European Development Fund (EDF), the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI, Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) and European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) can still be spent on institutional care, perpetuating the problem of institutionalisation of children.

You will be aware that the European Ombudsman has opened an own-initiative inquiry into the respect of fundamental rights in the EU's Cohesion Policy, focusing on how the European Commission ensures that EU funding is used in ways to comply with the EU Charter on Fundamental Rights. Living in a family environment is indeed a key fundamental right of children.

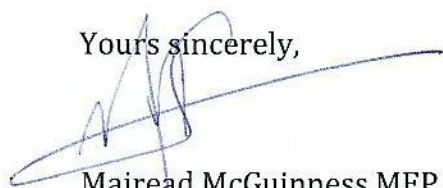
Therefore I urge you to make sure that the ex-ante conditionality on the transition from institutional to community based care is implemented immediately in all EU Member States and that a reliable and sufficient monitoring mechanism is put in place.

Furthermore I urge you to engage the entire European Commission to work horizontally to ensure the necessary steps are taken to guarantee EU funds spent outside the Union are never used to support institutions, but only to support the transition from institutionalised care towards community-based care and poverty reduction mechanisms which help keep children in their families.

Finally, the Commission can set an example and influence other major funders and donors, such as the World Bank and bilateral government donors, to jointly plan and implement change for children, ending institutionalisation, reinvesting funds in early childhood development, inclusive education and child protection services.

I look forward to working with you to achieving these objectives, which are crucial for the wellbeing of children in Europe and worldwide.

Yours sincerely,



Mairead McGuinness MEP
Vice-President of the European Parliament

CC:

Valdis Dombrovskis, Vice-President for Euro & Social Dialogue

Jyrki Katainen, Vice-President for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness

Johannes Hahn, Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy & Enlargement Negotiations

Neven Mimica, Commissioner for International Cooperation & Development

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Dimitris Avramopoulos, Commissioner for Migration & Home Affairs

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