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Government urged to put equality at heart of future funding policies

The Equality Commission is urging the UK Government to put equality and good relations considerations at the heart of its future funding policies, as it prepares for the withdrawal of European Union funding next year. Any funding model must address local needs and priorities to improve the lives of people here.

Geraldine McGahey, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission, said “EU funding has been significant in the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations over many decades in Northern Ireland. It has provided vital support to many organisations working to combat poverty, promote social inclusion, support equality and address the needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable people. Many people, including those with disabilities, members of ethnic minority communities, young people and women have benefited greatly from this funding.

“Since the Government’s Shared Prosperity Fund was launched at the end of April this year, there has been a lack of detail about the administration and delivery of the fund in Northern Ireland. The Commission is asking Government urgently to provide greater clarity on how the Shared Prosperity Fund will continue to support the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations in Northern Ireland.”

These calls were made as the Commission launched a [research report on the impact of the loss of EU funding on equality groups](#) (*pdf*) here and published a series of associated [policy recommendations for Government](#) (*pdf*).

The Commission is recommending that there should be no reduction in funding previously made available under European Union funded programmes. It also recommends that continuation funding and bridging arrangements should be provided until the Shared Prosperity Funding is operational, to avoid a financial ‘cliff-edge’ for affected organisations. Any funding processes should be simple and have transparent and objective criteria, fair processes and the ability to monitor equality outcomes.

The Commission also recommends that the Shared Prosperity Fund be delivered through Northern Ireland Government departments rather than through central UK structures. It is also important that the Northern Ireland Executive and departments should clarify how the needs of people from different equality groups, who have been supported through European Union funding, will be supported by the Executive in the future and how they will address any potential shortfall in funding.

Ms McGahey continued: “In commissioning this report and making these recommendations, we have listened to the views of people working across civil society, the community and voluntary sector and the public sector. The message from them is very clear – they are extremely worried that the lack of clarity around

future funding will put vital grassroots projects at risk.

“Northern Ireland faces many unique challenges, including those related to our past, which cannot be overcome without continued investment. Any break or loss of funding will have a devastating effect on many groups who work tirelessly to deliver services in local communities across Northern Ireland. The UK Government, the Northern Ireland Executive and its departments need to work together to help offset the impact of any future loss of funding and ensure that there is no gap between the end of European Union funding and the start of its replacement,” concluded the Chief Commissioner.

Notes to Editor

- ‘Loss of EU Funding’ webpage: www.equalityni.org/EU-Funding
- Download our [policy recommendations in full](#) *(pdf)*
- Download the University of Ulster research report: [EU Funding: Impact of Brexit on Section 75 Equality Groups in Northern Ireland](#) *(pdf)*