

“The UK is keen to continue to cooperate with the EU”

Interview with Claire Godfrey, Head of policy and campaigns at Bond
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At the BOND Annual Conference, Penny Mordaunt, Secretary of State for International Development, announced that English NGOs should have access to EU funding programs after Brexit - what could such a regulation look like?



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Bond and our members have been pushing the UK government to ensure that EU funding for our programmes is covered in the event of a no deal, or if the EU withdraws their funding, by underwriting their programmes if necessary. In the event of a withdrawal agreement being agreed, the UK's priority should be to ensure that UK NGOs have full and fair access to the same budgets they have access to now, until the end of the current multiannual financing framework. For any future partnership between the EU and the UK, the UK should call for full and fair access

for UK NGOs when it comes to budgets that the UK contributes to, as well as oversight. However, at this moment in time the withdrawal agreement and the future partnership have obviously not been agreed yet.

What fears do the English development organizations associate with Brexit?

In the event of a no deal or further Brexit uncertainty, we would be concerned about currency fluctuations because delivering aid and development programmes needs a level of predictability. Currency volatility affects predictability, long-term planning and therefore sustainability. Donors and NGOs are going to have to do some contingency planning to ensure that the currency fluctuations we are seeing post-Brexit do not have such a harmful impact on programming.

The UK civil society sector working in development and aid will be concerned about any new relationship which ends up leaving the poorest people worse off. The UK is keen to continue to cooperate with the EU with regards to development by contributing to funds and initiatives that are open to non-EU members or sit outside EU structures and processes. However, there are risks that come with too much “flexibility”. Firstly, you gain more flexibility in the allocation of aid resources by limiting scrutiny by parliament and the public. There is also the potential related risk that open, flexible funding vehicles could circumvent the requirements on EU aid spending on development in the Lisbon Treaty, which keep the focus on poverty reduction and sustainable development.

The big risk is that responses to “crisis” situations could enable donors to re-orientate aid towards their domestic strategic priorities.

Do you see any opportunities in Brexit?

On the positive side, UK and European civil society organisations recognise the benefits of two of the world's biggest donors continuing to cooperate and coordinate in the fight against global poverty, and in response to humanitarian crises. Cooperation enables donors to attain value for money, share analysis, and reach more countries and help more poor people.

Both the EU and UK are committed to the European Consensus on Development which should ensure they do not use aid resources that drift too far away from international development commitments and standards. Historically the UK, encouraged by the voice of its CSOs, has put a strong emphasis on poverty reduction, on aid to poorer countries and on sustainable development, compared to some of the member states, for whom the priorities are different. So the UK having a seat at the table is important for UK-based CSOs to continue our advocacy.

What do you expect from Europe and the British Government to ensure good development cooperation?

As, above, the EU and UK need to work together to uphold their own and international commitment on international development, such as focusing their development on poverty reduction, achieving the SDGs, and adhering to aid and development effectiveness principles.