



Partnership in Cohesion Policy

European Social Fund support to social partners in the 2007-2013 period

1. Introduction

Cumulating evidence shows that a system of negotiation and coordination of representative players which is densely implanted and covering a large part of firms and employees contributes to economic and social performance. In addition, the participation of industrial-relations players in political and institutional debates offers a decisive means of improving the environment necessary for growth if the different parties involved in social governance see the coordination and partnership as a common good.¹ Social dialogue can play a positive role at company, sector, regional, national and European level.

The Lisbon Strategy builds on a partnership approach for its successful implementation and, at their Spring Summit 2006, the Heads of States stressed that *"an effective renewed Partnership for growth and employment will require an active contribution and responsibility of the social partners"*.

This note aims to raise awareness of relevant stakeholders at all levels of the importance of partnership in addressing the complex and multi-faceted issues inherent in today's employment, social inclusion, and human capital policies.

The legislative framework for Cohesion Policy, in place for 2007-2013, reinforces both the importance and the responsibility of social partners in the accomplishment of the Cohesion policy objectives. Given the importance of the role of social partners in Cohesion policy and in the implementation of the Structural Funds, notably the European Social Fund (ESF), the Commission has produced three fiches² covering the different and yet interlinked themes:

- Partnership in Cohesion policy
- Social Partners as beneficiaries of ESF
- Complementarity and consistency within other Community financial instruments.

2. Policy background

At the European level, the social partners, with the active support of the European Commission, have laid the foundations of the European social dialogue, and both its tripartite and bipartite dimensions have developed in a dynamic and innovative way. Pursuant to Articles 138 and 139 of the Treaty, the Commission consults European social partners before submitting any proposal in the employment and social policy field. This means that social partners have a great impact on the final quality, and consequently, the added value of community action. They also have the possibility to enter bipartite negotiations on the issue. In recent years the social partners have wished to pursue a more autonomous dialogue at the European level and are adopting a diverse array of initiatives,

1. European Commission (2006) *Industrial Relations in Europe*

2. The fiches have been prepared in co-operation with the DG EMPL units responsible for Social Dialogue, Industrial Relations Unit; and PROGRESS; and have received input from the EU social partners

including an increasing number of ‘new generation’ joint texts, in which they undertake certain commitments or make recommendations to their national members, and seek to actively follow-up the text at the national level. This requires greater interaction between the different levels, including effective industrial relations systems and social partner capacities at national level.

Partnerships have proven to be a crucial factor in ensuring the effectiveness of the cohesion policy within the context of the Lisbon Agenda – strengthening economic and social policy by improving employment and job opportunities. The current employment guidelines highlight the key role to be played by social partners in the achievement of the Lisbon Strategy objectives and explicitly mention their role in guidelines 21 and 22³. In support of this approach, the ESF regulation for 2007-2013 stipulates that the Fund will support actions in line with the guidelines and recommendations adopted under the European Employment Strategy (EES).

3. Applying the partnership principle

It must be emphasised that the **key principles** of EU cohesion policy – programming, **partnership**, co-financing and evaluation – continue to apply in the programming period 2007-2013.

The partnership principle is fundamental to the implementation of European cohesion policy. It implies close cooperation between the Commission, the authorities at national, regional and local level in the Member States and other governmental and non-governmental organisations and bodies during the different stages of the implementation cycle of the Structural Funds.

The Community strategic guidelines for cohesion⁴ (CSG) recognise the importance of involving regional and local actors and social partners, in particular in areas where greater proximity is essential, such as innovation, the knowledge economy and the new information and communication technologies, employment, human capital, entrepreneurship, support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) and access to capital financing.

This principle of partnership is enshrined in the articles of the legislation for the programming period 2007-2013⁵:

Article 11

1. The objectives of the Funds shall be pursued in the framework of close cooperation, (hereinafter referred to as partnership), between the Commission and each Member State. Each Member State shall organise, where appropriate and in accordance with current national rules and practices, a partnership with authorities and bodies such as:

(a) the competent regional, local, urban and other public authorities;

(b) the economic and social partners;

(c) any other appropriate body representing civil society, environmental partners, non-governmental organisations, and bodies responsible for promoting equality between men and women. Each Member State shall designate the most representative partners at national, regional and local level and in the economic, social, environmental or other spheres (hereinafter referred to as partners), in accordance with national rules and practices, taking account of the need to promote equality between men and women and sustainable development through the integration of environmental protection and improvement requirements.

2. The partnership shall be conducted in full compliance with the respective institutional, legal and financial powers of each partner category as defined in paragraph 1.

3. The partnership shall cover the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of operational programmes. Member States shall involve, where appropriate, each of the relevant

3. http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/employment_strategy/prop_2005/adopted_guidelines_2005_en.htm

4. http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/2007/osc/l_29120061021en00110032.pdf

5. Article 11 of the General Regulation No. 1083/2006

partners, and particularly the regions, in the different stages of programming within the time limit set for each stage.

4. Each year the Commission shall consult the organisations representing the economic and social partners at European level on assistance from the Funds.

The provisions of Article 11 of the General Regulation (GR) require Member States to apply the partnership principle right from the beginning of the preparation of the Structural Funds interventions and to involve *the most representative partners at national, regional and local level and in the economic, social, environmental or other spheres*. This requires an active, broad, balanced and transparent participation of the relevant partners in the process.

Partnership in preparation

The most important tasks of the partnership in the preparation of the 2007-2013 period are:

- to contribute to the preparation of the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) through active participation in the consultation process (Art. 27 GR)
- to contribute to the drafting of the Operational Programme (OP), through cooperation with the designated bodies for drawing up the OP (Art. 32 GR).

In assessing the NSRF and OPs, the Commission therefore verifies the partnership approach:

- the individual partners and other actors that have been involved, the responsibilities of actors and the definition of the scope of their participation;
- how the identification of relevant partners has respected the principle of transparency, and made been made public;
- actions taken to facilitate a wide involvement and active participation.

Partnership in implementation

The partnership principle is linked to the principle of *subsidiarity* which implies that decisions should be made at the level most competent to carry them out, within the context of a broader cooperative network which pools resources and experiences.

By way of example, in **Austria**, the responsibilities of management of Structural Funds are shared between the federal and regional authorities. Therefore, the Structural Fund delivery mechanisms contributed to creation of various co-ordination structures (e.g. ÖROK – Austrian Conference on Spatial Planning) and co-operation networks through the introduction of the partnership principle at all stages of the programme management process.

Over the last few years, various evaluations on the impact of partnership in the Structural Funds have drawn attention to the positive benefit and added value that partnership can bring to the implementation of cohesion policy through enhanced legitimacy, greater coordination, guaranteed transparency, and better absorption of funds through improved selection of projects and dissemination of information to potential project promoters⁶.

The common wisdom that social inclusion and quality employment are complex and multi-dimensional challenges means in practice that they can be more effectively met if projects are run in partnership rather than by one organisation on its own.

6. "The thematic evaluation of the partnership principle: final synthesis report", Tavistock Institute, 1999; "A Study on the Efficiency of the Implementation Methods for Structural Funds", ÖIR in association with LRDP and IDOM, 2003; "Opinion on the Partnership for Implementing the Structural Funds" European Economic and Social Committee, 2003; and "The EU partnership principle: still a sustainable governance device across multiple administrative arenas?", Michael W. Bauer, 2002.

Partnership in Monitoring Committees

In the current period, the participation of partners in Monitoring Committees is one of the more visible aspects of the application of the partnership principle in the Structural Funds. In most cases, the social partners have the same participatory or voting rights as other members of the Monitoring Committees.

A good example takes place in **Greece**, where the partnership working in the Monitoring Committees has ensured the dissemination of information related to Structural Funds programmes and projects and in this way it has helped to increase participation among stakeholders⁷.

According to the Regulation for 2007-2013, the monitoring committees (MC) fall with the exclusive competence and jurisdiction of the Member States (Article 63 and 64 GR). The composition of the MC should reflect the principles of partnership and gender equality (Article 11(2) and Article 16 – GR), and learn from the good practices in previous periods.

4. Good Governance in ESF

Partnership in practice

Sustainable development and conflict avoidance require a partnership between different interests, based on mutual trust and shared values. Several issues need to be addressed if government, private sector and civil society are to work efficiently to improve service delivery. Development issues and challenges have become too complex and interdependent and the financial and managerial resources for addressing them too scarce, for any one single institution, public or private, to be able to respond effectively to all these socio-economic challenges alone.

The efficient and effective implementation of actions supported by the ESF depends on good governance and partnership between all relevant territorial and socioeconomic actors, and in particular the social partners and other stakeholders, including those at national, regional and local level. The social partners have a central role in the broad partnership for change, and their commitment to strengthening economic and social cohesion by improving employment and job opportunities is essential.

The ESF Committee⁸ itself reflects the importance of involving social partners in implement the ESF. Since its inception it has been a tripartite Committee with equal representation of social partners and governments.

This allows the social partners to be actively involved in the operation of the ESF at EU level as well as in the Member States.

This principle is given legal effect through article 5 of the ESF Regulation 1081/2006 whereby “*the Member States shall ensure the involvement of the social partners*”. This involvement, shall take place, where appropriate, in the different stages of programming: preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of operational programmes.

Article 5

- 1. The ESF shall promote good governance and partnership. Its support shall be designed and implemented at the appropriate territorial level taking into account the national, regional and local level according to the institutional arrangements specific to each Member State.*
- 2. The Member States shall ensure the involvement of the social partners and adequate consultation and participation of other stakeholders, at the appropriate territorial level, in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of ESF support.*

7. Partnership in the 2000-2006 programming period - Analysis of the implementation of the partnership principle – DG REGIO discussion paper- Nov 2005

8. Article 147 of the Treaty

In this respect the Social Partners are considered as privileged partners in the ESF.

Member States should ensure good governance by establishing a broad partnership for change by involving parliamentary bodies, the social partners, and stakeholders, including those at regional and local levels.

By way of example, in **Denmark**, where partnership is an accepted part of the implementation of the Structural Funds programmes, the drafting of national programmes is based on a bottom-up process with a wide-ranging partnership. The programme preparation and implementation is decentralised with the lead role played by various local authorities and agencies. Similarly, in **Germany**, a wide-range of socio-economic partners and external experts are involved from the development stage of the programmes onwards.

Gender mainstreaming and the promotion of gender equality should be ensured in all action taken, as equal opportunities and combating discrimination is essential for progress.

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5. Relevant references

- http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_dialogue/dialogue_en.htm
- COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION – Partnership for change in an enlarged Europe – Enhancing the contribution of European Social dialogue
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2004/com2004_0557en01.pdf
- EQUAL Guide for Development Partnerships
Learning from the experience of EQUAL partnerships
http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/data/document/partnerguiden_en.pdf
- Partnership Development Toolkit
A partnership oriented planning, monitoring and evaluation guide for facilitators of EQUAL Development and Transnational Partnerships
http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/data/document/pdtoolkit_en.pdf
- European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions: Social dialogue in the enlarged EU
<http://www.eurofound.eu.int/areas/industrialrelations/socialdialogue.htm>
- <http://www.ilo.org/>
- “The thematic evaluation of the partnership principle: final synthesis report”, Tavistock Institute, 1999; “A Study on the Efficiency of the Implementation Methods for Structural Funds”, ÖIR in association with LRDP and IDOM, 2003; “Opinion on the Partnership for Implementing the Structural Funds” European Economic and Social Committee, 2003; and “The EU ‘partnership principle’: still a sustainable governance device across multiple administrative arenas?”, Michael W. Bauer, 2002.
- Partnership in the 2000-2006 programming period - *Analysis of the implementation of the partnership principle – DG REGIO- discussion paper- Nov 2005.*

The above text is available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/esf/fields/partnership_en.htm



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