



**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**  
Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion DG

Resources, Communication  
**Communication, CAD**

Brussels, 9 April 2014  
EMPL G3/BK

## **MINUTES**

### **37<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Informal Network of ESF Information Officers (INIO) Rome (IT), 20 March 2014**

#### **1. OPENING AND WELCOME**

The chair (EMPL.G.3) welcomed the INIO members to Rome, underlining the fact that the presence of as many as 24 delegations showed the timeliness of such a meeting at the beginning of this new programming period. In this context, delegations were reminded of the obligation, according to Article 117 (4) of the Common provisions Regulation, to each nominate one designated member of this network.

#### **2. PRESENTATION BY HOST ORGANISATIONS**

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policies acknowledged the INIO meeting for its important role in exchanging know-how and ideas among the network members. As far the Ministry's own communication activities are concerned, the focus is currently on the preparation and implementation of the upcoming Youth Employment Initiative OP.

The Basilicata Region shared its experiences with organising a special event to help young people gain self-esteem, recognise their own talents, discover the opportunities of self-employment or even find their first job. The "Jobbing fest" initiative combines several elements attractive to young people and involves in particular a series of live testimonials by counsellors and entrepreneurs as well as well-known journalists and celebrities. Given the dramatic situation of the regional job market, with a decrease in the employment rate of 50%, a strong emphasis is put on self-employment as a realistic alternative to subordinate work. The Jobbing fest event, which is easily scalable at different levels, provides practical tips, tools and ideas and explains trends in the labour market.

The Emilia Romagna Region presented its innovative social media campaign organised in the aftermath of the 2012 earthquake. The devastating earthquake had

left many homes and thousands of businesses destroyed. Through the solidarity fund constituted by financial resources of Italian Regions OP, Emilia Romagna Region created a total of 520 training opportunities for people and companies. The corresponding information campaign was largely based on the use of social media and proved to be very cost effective. In effect, using Google and Facebook for banner campaigns, ads and sponsored posts allowed to very well reach the target groups in terms of geographic location and age groups. The Facebook campaign, for instance, reached 169 024 users within two weeks for not more than €1 447. Thanks to the integration of the offline and online campaigns, the website dedicated to the ESF funding received 50 000 page views during just two weeks.

Greece highlighted the innovative character of this campaign which included many ideas worth to be copied, and enquired about the way to identify the concrete targets. The Emilia Romagna Region explained that Google and Facebook offer all the required tools for precise targeting in geographic terms as well as regards the interest of users in specific topics. Around 200 000 people had been identified as potentially interested in the campaign. A communications agency was tasked with the implementation of the campaign, which would never have been possible through traditional media with such a modest budget.

On a question from Hungary, the Basilicata Region provided more details on the selection process of testimonials for the "Jobbing fest". These were mostly identified through the web and then approached personally. It was important to select a mix of personalities that would appeal to the audience and have a credible, relevant experience to share.

### **3. ESF COMMUNICATION WORK BY THE COMMISSION**

The Commission (EMPL.G.3) provided an overview of its recent and upcoming ESF communication activities. In October 2013, a series of communication products targeting the general public have been made available. These cover the four topics employment and mobility, the ESF for young people, social inclusion and better public services. For each topic, a [factsheet](#) (in 23 languages), a [video animation](#) (in 23 languages) and an [info graphic](#) (English only) are available from the ESF website for download. The videos can also be easily embedded in any other website.

The brochure "Seven Lives" is now available in all official languages. Hard copies can be ordered from [EU bookshop](#). So far, 30,000 copies have already been disseminated.

The new publication series "ESF thematic papers" presents specific aspects of legislation or implementation to a more specialised audience. Two issues have been edited to date: promoting good governance and promoting inclusive growth. An upcoming issue will present the Youth Employment initiative. The thematic papers are available for [download](#), in English only.

Furthermore, the Commission has published a brochure reproducing the European code of conduct for Partnership and the related Staff Working Document, available for [download](#) in English, with all other languages coming up soon. Two maps have been produced as well. The map showing the eligibility of regions for the Youth Employment Initiative can be [downloaded](#) in most official languages. The

ERDF/ESF map of categories of eligible regions can also be ordered as hard copy from the [EU bookshop](#).

Delegations were reminded of the ongoing effort to present interesting [project examples](#) from all over Europe on the Commission's website. An overview of the already available examples per country was shown and delegates were invited to continue proposing suitable material.

In the next months, the Commission will focus on working with each Member State to adequately publicise the adoption of the Partnership Agreements and certain major Operational Programmes (see agenda point 9).

#### **4. COMMUNICATING AT THE BEGINNING OF A NEW PROGRAMMING PERIOD: NEW RULES, NEW ACTORS... NEW IDEAS?**

The Commission (EMPL.G.3) introduced the topic with a look back to some key learnings from the "Telling the story" conference organised in Brussels in last December.

The results of the different workshops have been published and are accessible on the Commission's homepage. An interesting observation from these conclusions is that the vocabulary used in the document reflects openness, implies a collaborative spirit towards clients and invites them to participate in the information and communication work. In other words, the individual client, the citizen is seen as part of the communication effort and becomes a partner.

This is a good indication that the "Telling the story" event has contributed to raise awareness on a certain contradiction between the traditional way of thinking as representatives of public institutions and the way of thinking that colleagues increasingly aim to apply in the world of information and communication. Traditional "institutional thinking" is mostly CSC – closed, selective and controlled, while the collective work at the conference clearly pointed to a more desirable approach: one of "network thinking". Network thinking is ORS – open, random and supportive.

A key learning from the participative workshops at "Telling the story" is that they helped participants to understand that a different communication culture is needed, a "network thinking" where people play a key role, where relationships with people matter and where understanding through involvement takes place.

The Commission (EMPL.G.3, REGIO.DG.02) then went on to recall some of the most important elements of the rules for communication in the new programming period:

- Information officer, networks: the obligation for Member States to appoint a national information officer to coordinate communication. In this context, Member States are encouraged to set up a national communication network, bringing together relevant multipliers.
- Member States need to set up a single national website or web portal providing information about all OPs (ERDF (incl. ETC programmes), CF and ESF).

- List of operations: Member States must make available information about all operations (projects) in open and accessible formats via the single website / web portal.
- A budget for communication: Part of every programme's budget should be allocated to communication (taking into account the principle of proportionality). On average during the 2007-2013 funding period, this amounted to around 0.3% of the OP budgets.
- Strategy: The Monitoring Committee must adopt a 7-year communication strategy for each OP (within six months of the adoption of the OP). One Monitoring Committee can be responsible for a common communication strategy covering several OPs.
- Launch activity and annual activity: Managing Authorities or the Member State must organise a programme launch activity and, in the following years, at least one major information activity each year for the operational programme(s), targeted at potential beneficiaries, members of the public, the media etc.
- Communication point in Monitoring Committee: A communication point shall be included in the agenda of at least one Monitoring Committee meeting per year (progress report on results achieved, proposals for communication actions during the following year).
- Programme communication officer: Every programme must appoint a communication officer (can be the same person for several programmes) and inform the Commission of these designations.
- Billboards & poster: For ERDF and CF operations of more than €500,000 beneficiaries have to set up temporary billboards, then permanent plaques. For ERDF and CF operations below €500 000 and for all ESF operations, at least one A3 poster has to be displayed.
- All Managing Authorities must display the EU emblem (flag, plaque ...) at (preferably the entrance of) their premises throughout the year. Beneficiaries' information and communication measures must include a reference to the Fund(s).

Delegations then raised a number of detailed questions pertaining to the application of these new rules. On a question by Hungary, which plans to finalise its single, national communication strategy in the coming weeks, it was clarified that a strategy wouldn't necessarily have to detail particular communication actions, but rather set out the overall and specific communication objectives, targets, main approach, evaluation measures and available financial and human resources. The communication officer(s) should not be named in this document, but rather be communicated directly to the Commission.

On an inquiry by Denmark, the Commission recalled that the specific communications rules of Articles 115 to 117 as well as Annex XII of the Common Provisions Regulation apply only to ERDF, ESF and CF. It is therefore not obligatory to include information on the EAFRD and the EMFF on the single national website. However, Member States are still encouraged to do so where possible and appropriate.

Denmark also requested clarification on whether a launch event for the new period can at the same time count as major annual activity according to the rules for the previous programming period. The Commission pointed out that as long as

programmes from the previous period are still ongoing, the obligation for a dedicated annual activity remains. However, it could be imagined that these two activities take place simultaneously. Bulgaria reported that their annual major event is planned for May under the previous OP and that a national launch event for the new programmes would only take place after their final approval. In this respect, Bulgaria wondered whether it would be better to instead launch each OP individually. Cyprus informed delegations that they intend to combine the launch of the new programme with the major annual activity for the previous one. The event will show the future funding opportunities and an exhibition will highlight the results achieved under the 2007-2013 one. As far as the previous period's programmes are concerned, Hungary opted for a different kind of major annual activity in 2014: a comprehensive publication and e-book will showcase results and will be disseminated widely.

Several delegations requested information on the process for finalising the Implementing Act on communication. This Act is currently undergoing inter service consultation in the Commission and would hopefully be ready for a final discussion with Member States in April, followed by adoption shortly after.

On a question from the UK, the Commission clarified that the "operation summary" field in the newly required list of operations should contain a concise and clear description of the nature of the operation's activities. It is suggested that such information could possibly already be collected at the time of project application.

## **5. PARALLEL WORKSHOPS: COMMUNICATING AT THE BEGINNING OF A NEW PROGRAMMING PERIOD**

The parallel workshops in this meeting were designed to address the topic "Communicating at the beginning of a new period ". With a focus on mutual learning, each group was animated by a moderator, assisted by a rapporteur to summarize the group's findings.

Delegates split into three working groups:

Group 1: Strategies, OP launch activities and cross-Fund collaboration. Case study: Italy.

Group 2: Working with and for beneficiaries. Case studies: Hungary, Italy.

Group 3: Websites and list of operations. Case study: Finland.

## **6. PRESENTATION OF THE WORKSHOPS' MAIN FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

In working group 1, the Italian communication strategy of the Youth Guarantee was presented by Italia Lavoro, the Agency of the Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies. The paper is at present almost completely defined and is pending formal approval. A unique national communication strategy has been planned at a central level and then shared with the regions through the Italian network of ESF communication officers. The communication plan includes: the YEI brand, the national website offering a unique access point to the information on the YEI all over Italy, a national advertising campaign and social media dissemination, an e-magazine, a TV format dedicated to real life stories and a catalogue of products

(brochures, cards, exhibition set-up and other communication tools, such as advertising kit for beneficiaries), all of which will be made available to the Regions. The Regions can customize the YEI brand, for example adding the name of the Region, the brand of a specific local YEI initiative, etc. The national YEI art concept (institutional promo, advertising images, brand and pay-off, stamp) has been conceived through to an online contest (crowdsourcing), using a small budget. The communication campaign can start as soon as the YEI will kick off.

Other participants then gave an insight into their new strategies and launch events, including: road shows, seminars and conferences on past results and future aims, videos, tv ads and campaigns, online based competitions or e-publications collecting success stories, open days. It became obvious many colleagues are facing similar challenges for the next programming period, notably with regard to addressing communication at national and at regional level, combining communication of different funds, providing information on the closure of one programming period and on the beginning of the new one.

Among the various solutions identified by participants were in particular:

- prepare a two-step communication, e.g. first at a national level and then at a local level; or, first at a more general level and then declined for specific funds. At a national/general level, one should try to keep the message as general and simple as possible. This is obviously easier in case of a single theme, such as for a YEI OP. At a local level, messages can become more specific and events and other communication activities more targeted;
- exploit the existing networks of key actors that can act as multipliers;
- integrate communication in the projects from the very beginning, so that also beneficiaries can correctly convey the message.

Working group 2 looked at two dimensions of the work with beneficiaries: helping beneficiaries in their responsibilities / obligations for communication and informing potential beneficiaries on co-funding opportunities.

The first case study in this group was presented by the Basilicata Region. For the period 2007-2013, the Managing Authority had developed uniform communication tools with a graphic framework (logos and visuals but also examples for websites). A regional network was built at the beginning of the programming period with accredited training bodies on communication aspects such as a project summary sheet and a video lesson (which was realized as a TV program) as well as an online questionnaire. In addition, all calls for proposals included an article on communication obligations. As a result, a common graphic line was used for all communication activities, and references on ESF co-financing were consistently included. For this new period, the Region plans to continue the action and in particular carry on the cooperation with the accredited training bodies.

In a second case study, Hungary presented its communication package for beneficiaries with guidance on all obligations and useful templates for different purposes. The package also provides the possibility to plan the layout of billboards or posters on-line, so that projects wouldn't need to procure graphic design services. Three different packages have been developed to cover the different categories of beneficiaries and depending of the importance of the project, all requiring the use of a common visual identity. Finally, a matrix table with questions and answers on the

communication obligation helps beneficiaries to easily identify what they need to do in different circumstances.

Participants then suggested that such a matrix could be turned into an on-line search engine. A different approach to assisting beneficiaries can be project open days, where often the Managing Authority can cover the costs for the beneficiaries who otherwise couldn't run significant communication activities. Another option for effective communication can be joint activities with the major beneficiaries, for instance through common media relation actions.

In a discussion on the use of logos and visual identities, participants underlined the importance of emphasizing the European Union logo. For a common national logo, Bulgaria had organised a national contest where a jury of managing authorities identified a single logo. The YEI OP is the occasion for Italy to use a single logo and brand for all Regions. On this aspect, participants wondered whether a clarification would be needed in the implementing Act.

A question was raised about Annex XII 2.2 Point 3 of the CPR which states that "Any document relating to the implementation of an operation which is used for the public or for participants, including any attendance or other certificate, shall include a statement to the effect that the operational programme was supported by the Fund or Funds". The reference to the OP requires clarification as this would be burdensome for beneficiaries. Delegates therefore asked for an interpretation allowing to refer (only) to the Fund(s).

In working group 3, Finland presented the national single web portal ([www.structuralfunds.fi](http://www.structuralfunds.fi)) and the list of operations. The portal is currently still under construction and will be a single portal with all basic information on ESI funds with links to the individual OP sites. For a start, it will present the Structural Funds only but at a later stage, information regarding fisheries and agriculture should be added.

The portal will be Finnish and Swedish, with some parts and elements also translated into English. It will contain information for the general public on ESI funds, examples of projects, practical information for beneficiaries as well as rules and regulations. Four currently independent regional sites will be linked to the single web portal, where users can find information for each region's plans and objectives.

Participants commented on the challenge to combine both old and new programming period information. Clear signposting and distinction of applicable rules would be crucial especially with regard to potential beneficiaries. Also, the general structure of information at the portal would need to be very well prepared. Surveys and any other form of feedback could play an important role in identifying the need of users.

Bulgaria briefly described the national web portal <http://www.eu.funds.bg> which was put in place in 2008. Greece shared information on the portal [www.espa.gr](http://www.espa.gr) which is created on a technological platform that allows interconnection with the websites of OPs and ESF ([www.esfhellas.gr](http://www.esfhellas.gr)), facilitating the automatic exchange and common use of information and files. The Estonian web portal is currently already covering EARDF and ESF and will be extended to cover information on all ESIF

Finland then also presented its list of operations. It will be updated daily through its connection to the management system and it contains all relevant information. Finnish and Swedish are used throughout. In addition, headings, project names and even project summaries are also available in English since already in the application form, beneficiaries need to include a short description in English

Connection with other information systems also allows extracting additional data, such as examples of the good projects. This information triggered a discussion among participants about the responsibility for selection of successful projects and the related criteria.

Participants concluded that the role of the beneficiaries has to be central to the development process for the web portal. Surveys and other web resources can be very helpful, not only to identify which information the different user groups are interested in, but also to subsequently test if information and data are presented in a sufficient and understandable way. Developing a good, user friendly portal is a constant learning process.

List of operations should be in a format that enables their connectivity with other information sources, such as drawing the examples of good practice projects from the list of operation. It is however important to define clear selection criteria when selecting certain projects as successful and providing that kind of information to end users. Setting up objective criteria, appointing the body responsible for selection of projects and proper wording (it is better to use: good practice examples rather than successful projects) is of crucial importance in this process.

In the general discussion that followed, delegations commented in particular on the issue of the single web portal and the list of operations. Denmark questioned whether it would always provide sufficient added value to fully integrate information on all Funds, since this often requires considerable investment. In some cases, it could make more sense to restrict the portal to a simple collection of links leading to the different Funds' more detailed sites. Greece highlighted again the challenge of clearly defining what constitutes a good practice example. In that respect, a set of commonly agreed criteria could be useful. In several countries, the Intermediate Bodies select these examples, as they are closest to programme implementation. France underlined that the criteria for success depend largely on the context and type of activity and Poland suggested that only a few representative examples would be needed that best illustrate how the Funds are used. Belgium suggested that when featuring project examples, it is recommendable to have administrative staff as interview partners, as they are not bound by political constraints or election periods, and to make sure to cover a good cross-section of projects within a programme.

## **7. INFO GRAPHICS – TURNING DATA INTO MESSAGES**

Hungary presented the comprehensive info graphic it has produced to present the results of EU funding in an attractive and easily understandable manner. The graphic in form of a tree depicts a breakdown per region according to funding levels. Thematic areas are represented by corresponding icons and per region, in addition to data on the number of projects and total funding, more details and project examples are available. Results are also aggregated per thematic area.



The associated campaign included an animated video, print ads and an online banner campaign. Main challenge was the collection of data for about three weeks, followed by design work of about one week.

The Commission (EMPL.G.3) shared its experience from the creation of info graphics based on Annex 23 data. In that exercise, the aggregation of data across all EU countries proved very difficult and disputed. Also, the acceptance of innovative design choices can be limited in an institutional environment.

France reported a similar experience with regard to data aggregation, where it was finally decided not to question the data quality available in the information system, but rather accept these data as reported.

## **8. REPORT FROM THE ESF LAUNCH CONFERENCE**

The Commission (EMPL.E.1) gave an account of the event's highlights and referred in particular to the fruitful exchanges that took place in the different workshops of the event. The technical workshops covered important and new aspects of the new programming period: Joint Action Plans, transnationality, simplified cost options, financial engineering, the performance framework, monitoring and evaluation and partnership. The policy workshops focused on the areas of public employment services and transnational labour mobility, youth employment, active inclusion, early childhood education and care and efficient public administration.

For all these workshops background papers highlighting the key elements and the link to the European Semester are available on the ESF website and a summary report from the conference will soon become available as well:

<http://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=68&langId=en&eventId=152>

## **9. ORGANISATION OF PA AND OP LAUNCH EVENTS AND COLLABORATION WITH THE COMMISSION**

The Commission outlined its suggestions for organising joint media activities in every country on the occasion of the adoption of Partnership Agreements. The PA adoptions are seen as a significant milestone, concluding long periods of negotiation, and marking the agreement on concrete objectives in a coherent context of Europe-wide goals for growth and jobs. The Commission proposes in particular the organisation of high-level press conferences in each capital, possibly including the ceremonial signing of the document by possibly a Commissioner and the corresponding national representatives. Such events could be organised in the frame of already planned conferences, or be set-up separately, depending on the calendar and other factors. Delegates were asked for their support for this initiative and to initiate first discussions in their organisations, ahead of any formal and concrete proposals from the Commission.

Germany signalled that it aims to use its annual event on 23 June for publicising the PA. Both the Federal Labour Minister and Commissioner Andor are invited to this event. Other delegations gave an indication of some planned launch activities. For instance, Poland and also Portugal plan to kick off in September the launch campaigns for their OPs.

On questions from several delegations, the Commission pointed out that since the actual adoption dates for the PAs are still uncertain, close contacts between all parties will be necessary to make sure press conferences can be organised on short notice. While informal contacts are already being established, any official request by the Commission would be forthcoming through its Representations in the capitals.

In conclusion, several delegations including Portugal, Bulgaria and Latvia already signalled their readiness for collaboration on such events, while for most participants, this meeting served as the trigger to further look into this matter and to spread the information within their organisations.

## **10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Commission (REGIO.DG.02) informed delegations about an upcoming Technical Assistance platform for Financial Instruments which will include a helpdesk, a stakeholder conference, a website and documentation. More information, for dissemination to all potentially interested groups, will be made available in due time.

The chair thanked the Italian delegation for co-organising this meeting and all delegates for their participation. The next INIO meeting will take place in June in Budapest, Hungary.

Enclosure: List of delegations

The presentations given at the meeting have been disseminated through the group's restricted work space on RegioNetwork 2020: <https://www.yammer.com/regionetwork>.

### 37<sup>th</sup> INIO Meeting – List of delegations

COUNTRY	PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS (NO OF DELEGATES)
<b>Austria</b>	-
<b>Belgium</b>	ESF Agency Flanders (1) ESF Agency Wallonia (1)
<b>Bulgaria</b>	Administration of the Council of Ministers (1) Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (1)
<b>Croatia</b>	Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds (1)
<b>Cyprus</b>	Directorate General for European Programmes, Coordination and Development (1)
<b>Czech Republic</b>	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (1)
<b>Denmark</b>	Danish Business Authority (1)
<b>Estonia</b>	Ministry of Finance (1)
<b>Finland</b>	Ministry of Employment and the Economy (2)
<b>France</b>	Ministry of Labour, Employment, Vocational Training and Social Dialogue (2)
<b>Germany</b>	Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (1) Authority for Labour, Social Affairs, Family and Integration of Hamburg (1)
<b>Greece</b>	Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Welfare (2)
<b>Hungary</b>	National Development Agency (2)
<b>Ireland</b>	-
<b>Italy</b>	Ministry of Labour and Social Policies (3) Basilicata Region (2) Emilia Romagna Region (3) Italia Lavoro (3)
<b>Latvia</b>	Ministry of Finance (1) Ministry of Welfare (1)
<b>Lithuania</b>	Ministry of Social Security and Labour (1) European Social Fund Agency (1)
<b>Luxembourg</b>	Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Economy (1)
<b>Malta</b>	Planning and Priorities Coordination Division (1)
<b>The Netherlands</b>	Ministry for Social Affairs and Employment (1)
<b>Poland</b>	Ministry of Infrastructure and Development (2)
<b>Portugal</b>	ESF Managing Authority (1) NSRF Observatory (1)
<b>Romania</b>	-
<b>Slovakia</b>	Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family (1)
<b>Slovenia</b>	-
<b>Spain</b>	Ministry of Employment and Social Security (1)
<b>Sweden</b>	Swedish ESF Council (1)
<b>United Kingdom</b>	Department for Work and Pensions – ESF England (1) The Scottish Government - European Structural Funds Division (1) Welsh European Funding Office (1) Department for Employment and Learning – Northern Ireland (1)
<b>European Commission</b>	DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion: Unit "Communication" – EMPL.G.3 (4) Unit "ESF Policy and Legislation " – EMPL.E.1 (1) DG Regional Policy: Unit "Communication" – REGIO.DG.02 (1)