

**Seminar on
INTEGRATING INNOVATION AND TRANSNATIONAL
CO-OPERATION INTO ESF PROGRAMMES FOR 2007-2013**

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**The place of innovation and trans-national co-operation
in the ESF Programmes 2007 – 2013**

SPEECH BY

**LENIA SAMUEL,
DEPUTY DIRECTOR GENERAL
EUROPEAN COMMISSION,
DG EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL AFFAIRS
AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here today. I am especially pleased to see so many European Social Fund partners from across the EU, including Romania and Bulgaria.

Less than a month ago, I saw many of you in Vilnius for the first seminar on programme planning for the ESF which was a success. I believe that we all left with valuable information and knowledge on strategic and participative planning. The workshops in particular helped to clarify some practicalities in this area.

I hope that today's seminar on integrating innovation and trans-national co-operation into future ESF programmes will produce similar results. These will tie into our third seminar at the end of January on the role of partnership, empowerment and gender mainstreaming in ESF programmes.

(Introduction)

We meet at a crucial moment. Planning has already started for the next generation of ESF programmes. Member States are busy preparing their National Strategic Reference Frameworks and defining their future ESF Operational Programme objectives and priorities. So there is no time to waste.

As the design of new ESF programmes moves ahead, the Commission's key message is that Member States must take into account experience from the previous programming period. This has been a standard requirement of sound programming and programme development for some time, but it has been difficult to realise. Lessons learnt were not always collected systematically and disseminated to a broader audience. They were not always available in time, or transferable to the next generation of programmes and actions due to regulatory or procedural changes.

In the context of innovation and trans-national co-operation, the EQUAL initiative is a rich source of knowledge experience. It can provide us with a range of success stories, policy briefs, manuals, guides, reviews and evaluation reports, both at EU and national level. When EQUAL started in 1999, it opened up a new pathway for alternatives to more traditional labour market policies and actions. Both innovation and trans-national co-operation were two of its main building blocks. This is where we must draw our inspiration.

I would also like to underline that in designing future ESF programmes, Member States must ensure that learning continues throughout the entire programming period from 2007-2013.

Sharing experiences and exchanging best practices on a continuous and long-term basis is essential to getting the most out of the ESF's programmes and projects.

The more we learn the more progress we make, and today's seminar is an opportunity for us to look at different ways of integrating - or "mainstreaming" - innovation and trans-national cooperation into future ESF programmes.

That is why I would like to focus on two points:

- First, how innovation can make the ESF more effective;
- And second, the role of trans-national co-operation to the long-term success of ESF programmes.

(How innovation can make the ESF more effective)

Europe is faced with new challenges of globalisation, a shrinking workforce and fast-changing technological developments. To transform these challenges into opportunities, it must modernise existing policies and adapt to today's new social and economic realities. This requires new solutions to develop actions across a broad range of policy areas. It also means adjusting established delivery systems.

The EU's new strategy for growth and jobs stresses how important knowledge and innovation are to Europe's competitiveness and prosperity. Technological innovation is crucial, but social innovation is just as important.

Innovation can be a powerful stimulus for change and EQUAL has successfully demonstrated how social innovation can contribute positively to employment and social inclusion by finding new solutions to new challenges. For example:

- By reaching out **to integrate disadvantaged target groups** into the labour market, such as migrants or people with disabilities and diseases;
- By developing effective **links within the labour market**, such as education and work; inactivity and work; prison and work; family and private life and work;
- By adapting economic sectors, in particular care services; the social economy, or micro-firms;
- By modernising the **work environment** through flexible working time arrangements or work organisation;
- And by better **policy delivery and support mechanisms** that promote inclusion pathways to employment, or new approaches in life long learning.

What is important is that innovation is not a standard activity and does not follow a standard procedure. In the field of employment and social policy, innovative actions tackle complex issues and involve a broad range of actors.

To succeed, new ideas must be based on a sound analysis. A robust methodology for testing is vital as well as an effective strategy for communicating lessons learnt.

This is why the support and management of innovative actions takes more time and requires more resources for planning, management, evaluation and mainstreaming than standard activities. EQUAL has shown that the availability of professional programme support services has a decisive impact on the quality of innovative actions and on their impact. The level of institutional and administrative capacity will be essential to the new ESF programmes becoming more innovative and more effective. Organisations, governments and public authorities will have to be able to fully exploit new emerging technologies, as well as having the means to translate innovation into a reality.

(The importance of trans-national co-operation to the long-term success of the ESF)

This brings me to my second point: the importance of trans-national co-operation to the long-term success of the ESF. Co-operation and mutual learning – the very purpose of this conference – is vital.

The EU's goal to create a more inclusive labour market is an ambitious one. But by encouraging the transfer of knowledge and know-how at all levels, trans-national co-operation can provide the right learning conditions and a better climate in which to draw up new policies and methodologies.

We know from EQUAL's experience that although trans-national cooperation is not easy, it can often be the most effective way of achieving results. This is because trans-national cooperation provides a tool for the kind of lateral thinking we need to innovate. It brings forward new ideas that would never see light of day under normal circumstances.

This is why the Commission believes that all Member States should participate in trans-national cooperation. And this is why the draft ESF Regulation proposes that trans-national cooperation **'shall'** be supported by the ESF in the next programming round. The Commission has even made such cooperation more attractive by raising the level of co-financing by 10%.

Europe should fully exploit its diversity. This diversity can also be applied to effective labour market and social inclusion policies and delivery systems. We have so much to learn from each other, provided the partners exist. There are also many opportunities to share resources for developing and implementing new facilities or approaches. All of this helps to translate the EU's strategy for growth and jobs in a reality on the ground.

It is important to underline that the trans-national dimension in EQUAL is not simply "an optional extra" for a few actors. It is an integral part of all the partners' long-term work, at all levels – European, national, regional and local. The scope for trans-national co-operation in the new ESF programmes will be broader than in the past. This will allow for greater sharing of experience and expertise between a broad range of projects, networks or organisations, like implementation bodies, social partners, or ministries.

Integrating the "learning" dimension into the next generation of ESF programmes is a challenge. It is now up to the Member States to design ESF programmes which support reforms for stronger economic growth and for more and better jobs.

The Commission will also have its role to play. As part of this "learning" dimension in the new ESF programmes, the Commission sees itself as a broker of good practice and a facilitator for managing change.

As I have already said, this seminar is a platform for the exchange and transfer of good practice in planning the new ESF programmes. It also gives Member States the opportunity to articulate the type of complementary support they expect from the Commission to deliver the innovation and trans-national dimensions of programmes.

For our part, the Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities will work for the success of the EU's growth and jobs strategy and cohesion policy. We will continue to assist Member States in the development and implementation of their ESF programmes.

To conclude, the EU's success in creating more and better jobs and ensuring greater social cohesion lies in the collective improvement of all Member States. This solidarity - in terms of the transfer of knowledge as much as in terms of financing - is at the core of the European economic and social model. It represents potential growth which can benefit all Member States.

I would like to thank you for your attention and I wish you a productive and fruitful exchange of ideas. I look forward to the results contributing to the design and development of your new ESF programmes.