

ESF support to transnational cooperation 2007-2013

The main purpose of transnational cooperation is to contribute to employment policy and delivery reforms essentially through learning from other countries by bringing together people, administrations, social partners, NGOs and organisations in the field of employment, social inclusion and training. Exchange of information, sharing of good practice, and working together towards common solutions in a multicultural environment has an important multiplier effect: to strengthen the capacities to innovate; to modernise and adapt institutions to new social and economic challenges; to identify and assess issues and solutions for reforms in policy and delivery in order to meet the Lisbon targets; and to improve the quality of governance.

1. RATIONALE AND LEGAL BASIS

In the previous period the Commission has been the main motor and resource for stimulating and supporting transnational cooperation under the ESF and making it work through the EQUAL Community Initiative and innovative actions under Art.6. The revised Lisbon strategy emphasises the need to strengthen ownership of the reform agenda at national, regional and local level. In this context, it is essential that Member States and regions now assume the main responsibility for learning from one another through transnational exchange of knowledge and good practice. This is why the ESF Regulation (EC1081/2006) stipulates that transnational co-operation is an integrated feature of the ESF 2007-2013:

"The ESF shall also support transnational and interregional actions in particular through the sharing of information, experiences, results and good practices, and through developing complementary approaches and coordinated or joint action."

This provision invites Member States and regions to support transnational cooperation in all policy areas identified for ESF interventions, such as adaptability, labour market policies, social inclusion, human capital and strengthening public administration, for all types of actors, and for all types of exchange and cooperation. This is an important change in comparison to the current programming period where transnational cooperation under EQUAL is limited to a few policy themes and to synchronised collaboration between projects. Again, in contrast to EQUAL, the Commission has no prescriptive or leading role to play in making transnational cooperation happen.

In order to support the transnational dimension, the ESF regulation (Art. 8) grants a bonus, of an intervention rate increased by 10%, to Member States that establish a specific transnational priority axis within an operational programme.

2. SUPPORT OF TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION IN OPERATIONAL PROGRAMMES

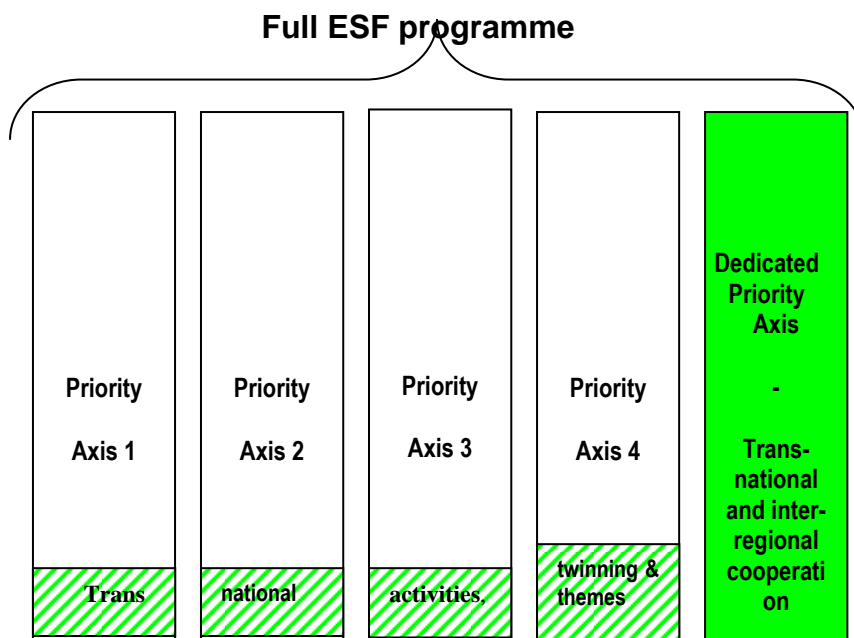
2.1. Programming options

The reflection note¹ on the integration of transnational and interregional cooperation in the new ESF programmes, drafted by a working group of Member States, outlines different programming options:

- the development of a specific OP priority dedicated to transnational cooperation (for which the ESF contribution may be increased by 10 %);

¹ Transnational and Interregional Cooperation in ESF programmes in the 2007-2013 programme period - A framework for programming, Report by an ad hoc working group of Member States on Transnational and Interregional Cooperation, Brussels, June 2006

- the integration of transnational cooperation with all, or some, "thematic" priorities of an OP, and
- the combination of the two principle options: a mixed approach combining the opportunity of an increased intervention rate in a dedicated priority with the flexibility of implementing transnational cooperation in other "thematic" priorities.



One of the most apparent differences, among the first two options, relates to the operations: in the "specific priority option" all operations comprised in the "transnational" priority should be "transnational" while in the "integrated option" only some operations within a priority would need to have a transnational dimension.

2.2. A broad and flexible approach

The ESF regulation does not, in any way, prescribe the provisions for implementing the support for transnational cooperation. It does, however, stipulate the requirement to support transnational cooperation through the sharing of information, experiences, results and good practices, and through developing complementary approaches and coordinated or joint action. Member States and regions therefore will have to identify the most suitable implementation arrangements.

Transnational cooperation can cover a broad range of activities, most of which have already been addressed explicitly in the ESF Regulation:

- Exchange of information, know-how, expertise, results and good practice,
- Exchange of people, e.g. between administrations, trainers, trainees, stakeholders in labour market and social inclusion policies,
- Joint development to avoid duplication of efforts, or to benefit from complementary work,
- Review, assessment, adaptation and transfer of experience from other countries
- Joint action, e.g. twinning between institutions and organisations.

Member States must assure that the costs related to these activities are eligible expenditure in the relevant Operational Programmes.

Public sector organisations in the field of employment policy can and should play a key role in promoting transnational cooperation, and in exploiting and using its results.

2.3. Effective implementing provisions in the Member States

Whatever programming option(s) has been chosen by Member States and regions, they will need – and have started already - to establish implementation mechanisms for each programme, in order to ensure impact and efficient management. These include:

- **Choice of themes** and issues that will be covered by transnational cooperation: Managing Authorities are free to choose whether transnational action should support all thematic priorities of the intervention, or selected ones. In any case, the choice needs to reflect:
 - policy needs as addressed in the National Reforms Programmes and in the Council recommendations on the implementation of employment policies;
 - the potential for sharing experience and results and for mutual learning to improve policy approaches and delivery systems;
 - emerging issues of European –wide interest;
 - complementarity with other Community transnational programmes, in particular in the field of education and training (thus ensuring compliance with Art 8, 2 of the ESF Regulation).

In addition, Member States have to make provisions and arrangements which allow them to review and modify their thematic preferences, if needed, in order to ensure flexibility and to accommodate emerging issues and political priorities during the 7-year implementation period.

- **Definition of eligibility:** For all themes chosen, and for the dedicated priority axis, Managing Authorities will have to define the eligibility rules for transnational operations ensuring that the ESF can support: 1.) the organisation or management of meetings, events, placements, visits networks, projects etc., 2.) participation in the above (travel, accommodation, subsistence); 3.) communication, translation and interpretation, and 4.) pertinent services (expertise, facilitation, training etc.).
- **Effective selection of transnational operations and effective use of the results.** The establishment of simple and robust frameworks and the provision of suitable tools for sharing information with potential partners, who are interested in entering into a transnational cooperation, can facilitate the search for partners. Such provisions can also include the creation of a transparent system for presenting the activities and results of transnational operations. In addition, it will be necessary to allocate resources to identify promising good practice, validate experience and results, synthesise the lessons learnt, and transfer them to relevant stakeholders and users.
- **Participation in transnational collaboration at programme level:** In order to effectively participate in EU-wide transnational exchanges, Managing Authorities will need to provide for active participation of ESF managers, members of Monitoring Committees, or representatives of national networks or focus groups in European networks and focus groups.
- **Identification of beneficiaries and promoters:** Member states have to identify suitable beneficiaries of transnational cooperation, i.e. to address the opportunity of transnational support to those actors that are best suited to organise and benefit from working with other countries, such as labour market institutions and training

organisations, project promoters, thematic networks, social partners, and eventually the ESF management institutions themselves.

It has to be stressed that the effectiveness of transnational co-operation depends on the quality of support structures and services in each operational programme. Their role is to provide guidance and support to overcoming barriers to using transnational cooperation.

As such indispensable activities, organised under the responsibility of the Managing Authority, has the aim to reinforce the capacity for the implementation of the programme it can be financed through the technical assistance budget available to each OP.

The above list of issues shows the need for exchange and consultation between National Authorities in order to streamline the process, guarantee an effective approach and solve potential problems. The role of the ESF Committee will be crucial in this purpose.

3. ESF SUPPORT FOR TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION

The Commission will provide flexible support to Member States and regions to facilitate the implementation of the transnational dimension of Operational Programmes. Commission support can not be specific to one system of implementation of transnational cooperation, as MS have the freedom to choose the option that is most suited to their needs and interests. Therefore, the Commission must adapt its approach so that its support can be of benefit to the different implementation arrangements of all Member States.

Referring to the transnational cooperation dimension of future ESF-programmes, the EQUAL final evaluation report concludes: *"A coordination role for the European Commission in matters of transnational cooperation is absolutely essential. This coordination role is even more important as more possible ways of exchange and collaboration are intended"*.

The **Commission** will provide swift support to emerging needs of Member States that are more effectively met at European level. Its role will be that of a broker of good practice, and a catalyst for change, by

- providing a common **discussion platform**, through a seminar and through sharing relevant information, to identify, at an early stage, the **themes** likely to be the focus of transnational cooperation (a first list, to start reflection and discussion, is presented in the Annex) ;
- supporting the **validation of good practices** (including national tools and guides) and results through e.g. peer reviews, and to provide space, on the **ESF web portal**, for the presentation of good practices;
- supporting, if needed, the creation of an IT platform or similar framework supporting **partner searches** and offers for transnational cooperation.
- bringing together, e.g. in the **Technical Working Group of the ESF Committee**, ESF managers, who are responsible for implementing the transnational operations under an OP, and develop a network of national contacts and resource points, that would also operate via a moderated web forum on implementation issues;
- supporting, as specified by Art 9 of the ESF regulation about technical assistance, **"exchanges of experience, awareness-raising activities, seminars, networking and peer reviews .."**, in particular, by providing support and thematic expertise for the establishment of thematic networks, exchange events and policy fora of groups of Member States and regions.

The Commission will, out of its own budget for technical assistance, be willing to provide complementary support for the specific actions promoting transnational exchange and cooperation in the fields listed above. It will provide such support in the form of professional expertise, logistics and through grants awarded to groups of Managing Authorities. Once the Operational Programmes identify the specific needs and scope for such support, the Commission will present a work programme and budget to the ESF Committee.

The grants recently allocated in the framework of EQUAL, to establish thematic and good governance platforms, can serve as pilots for identifying specific policy needs for transnational cooperation, for testing effective exchange and cooperation arrangements, and to gain the critical mass of commitment from Member States to collaborate around common ESF issues.

These platforms already manifest the new pattern of transnational cooperation, in that they are initiated and managed by groups of Member States with variable geometry, focusing on common concerns, facilitating networking between ESF managers and relevant stakeholders and allowing the development of a stable two-way bridge between good practice on the ground and policy issues at EU level.

Policy units within DG EMPL and other relevant DGs will be more involved in future work of the exchange platforms than they are at present. This will make mainstreaming more efficient and will stimulate a close interaction between those experiences "on the ground" and the Commission's policy development.

Transnational cooperation under the ESF could also be developed in parallel to and be a complement to the policy initiative "Regions for Economic Change". This initiative builds on the establishment of trans-European networks of **regions and cities** each working on a specific theme. Experience gathered from transnational cooperation between projects and programmes under the ESF could feed into the networks established under the "Regions for Economic Change" initiative and vice versa. This could be particularly valuable where regions or cities are not the only or the most important stakeholders with an issue. On the other hand, for themes where regional stakeholder involvement is particularly strong, exchanges of experiences made (mainly) under the ESF heading could be organised in the "Regions for Economic Change" framework.

In promoting transnational platforms and networks, the Commission will also ensure consistency and complementarity and the absence of duplication between actions supported under the ESF, and PROGRESS.

4. NEXT STEPS

In light of the role of the Commission outlined in the document, an action plan for Commission support will be established, in close partnership with Member States.

The Commission will organise on January 23 2007 a first meeting with Member States officials handling transnational cooperation in the OPs to discuss themes, good practice of implementation arrangements, the establishment of the network of contact points, partner search support, and possible support by the Commission.

A second meeting has been scheduled for the Technical Working Group of the ESF Committee on March 22, 2007.

Annex : Indicative list of themes for the transnational cooperation

This list has been developed on the basis of the priorities for the ESF, by taking into account the potential for mutual learning of certain policy fields, both in terms of experience and results to be shared, and policy approaches and delivery systems to be improved. The list has tried to capture the political problems, widespread in Europe, to which as yet no satisfactory policy response has been found.

The list will be indicative in the sense that it is not expected that transnational cooperation will develop on all themes, and that Member States might decide, over the length of the period, to cooperate on other issues.

Themes (according to art. 3 of ESF regulation)	Possible sub-themes
Adaptability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Life long learning - Entrepreneurship - Work organisation - Restructuring (of a company, a sector, a region)
Integration of job-seekers and inactive persons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Age management - Youth unemployment - Equal opportunities/increase the participation of women in employment - Work-life balance - Migrants, Immigrants / asylum seekers - Modernisation of labour market institutions
Integration of disadvantaged and combating discrimination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Persons with disabilities - Ex-offenders - Social economy - Ethnic minorities/racism/Roma - Victims of human trafficking - People with caring responsibilities - Urban development and social inclusion - Media and diversity
Enhancing human capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Systems for validation of skills
Promoting partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Structures for involving social partners and NGO's
Promoting Transnational Co-operation	
Promoting Innovation	
Gender mainstreaming	
Capacity building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Programme and Project Management