

**11th meeting of Thematic Network on Partnership
21 – 22 February 2019, Brussels**

Summary

The ESF Transnational Thematic Network on Partnership met on 21st and 22nd February 2019 in Brussels. In its 11th meeting the network expanded its scope of participants by inviting a wider selection of ESF MAs and interested stakeholders from the EU. Following up on discussions and recommendations for a revised European Code of Conduct on Partnership (ECCP), participants learned about how partnership initiatives between social partners, civil society and state representatives - in particular ESF Managing Authorities - are being practiced and how they might be strengthened.

On the first day, Robert Plummer from Business Europe presented research on the use of the ESF for the capacity building of social partners. Andy Churchill from Network for Europe (UK) gave an overview of the key features presented in the Civil Society Futures Inquiry which addresses current issues that civil society in the UK is facing in the context of global social, economical and political challenges. During the afternoon, the Partnership Learning Loop (Netherlands) led an interactive session on participatory evaluation of the quality of partnership processes.

On the second day, the focus of the meeting was on sharing successful place-based partnership practices. Michelle McDonagh from Pobal provided an overview of Ireland's approach to local community development which was followed by a presentation from Finbarr Filan on how this strategy works in the County of Sligo. Sophie Hermant then presented the methodology adopted by the project 'No Long-Term Unemployment in Local Communities' which centres on building partnerships between different actors of society to support the long-term unemployed in 10 different regions in France.

Action points/network plans:

- The PTN's 2nd Mini Peer Review will be held on 3rd and 4th April in Trento.
- Final examples for the draft revised partnership guide for ESF MAs should be submitted by 4th March, 2019.
- The deadline for member research on Partnership in EU Funds (beyond the ESF) is extended to 15th March, 2019.
- PTN Chair, Flanders (Belgium), handed over to Croatia who will take over this role until July 2019.
- The next network meeting will take place in Zagreb on 24th and 25th April 2019 (with an optional skills training day on April 26th). The meeting will be jointly organized with Public Administration and Governance TN on the topic of citizens' participation in public decision-making.

Agenda of the meeting: https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/filedepot_download/2692/2167 (copy the link to browser)

1. ECCP recommendations going forward – overview and update

Leda Stott, thematic expert of the network on Partnership, gave an introductory overview of the work of the network with focus on the Review of The European Code of Conduct on Partnership. The network revised the ECCP with aim to strengthen the partnership principle for the next programming period of the European Structural and Investment Funds and to promote better implementation of the principles in the Member States. As a result of the review, the network put forward set of recommendations:

- Managing Authorities should ensure diverse representation of partners in projects, programming and day-to-day work;
- Partnership should be based on transparency for all partners involved;
- Active forms of participation (bottom-up approach) should be integral part of programme implementation;
- The capacities of partners should be supported with capacity building trainings;
- Participatory assessments of partnership should be further developed;
- Exchange of learning between partners (and between different levels and funds) should be promoted and should be a responsibility of all partners involved.

Leda continued with an overview of the policy context framing the ECCP. Due to upcoming 2021-2027 programming period and the proposal for the new ESF+ Regulation and Common Provisions Regulation (CPR), the review of the ECCP is of great importance. The ECCP is also important for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and for successful policy coordination of the European Semester. In a global context, the ECCP further contributes to the Sustainable Development Goals and to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Presentation: https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/filedepot_download/2692/2165 (copy the link to browser)

Marie-Anne Paraskevas from the European Commission gave an update on recent developments related to partnership at the EU level. She stressed that the ECCP is a delegated act and therefore its implementation is obligatory for the Member States. The amendments proposed by PTN for a revised ECCP were distributed to the country desks of the European Commission for comments. Some country desks would like to do even more than what it was recommended by the PTN. The recommendation for involvement of the European Commission in the Monitoring Committee was not endorsed.

The ECCP was taken on board in the European Parliament's negotiations on the Common Provision Regulation and the ESF+ Regulation for the new programming period. The Council was not keen on making capacity building through a 5%TA contribution obligatory for all Member States.

ESF+ Regulations should be adopted under the Finnish presidency by December 2019.

Member States can already start preparing their Operational Programmes based on Country Reports.

The Common Provision Regulations of this programming period will continue in the next programming period (which is an additional reason why the ECCP needs to be revised in this programming period).

2. Capacity building for social partners

Robert Plummer from Business Europe presented findings from a study on the involvement of social partners in the work of the European Structural and Investment Funds Managing Authorities based on a survey of social partner views across EU Member States. The key findings of the study are as follows:

- There is high awareness of the ECCP
- The implementation of the ECCP is low (29% respondents stated that the partnership principles are being fully implemented)
- There is low involvement of social partners in Monitoring Committees (60% of respondents stated that the partnership principles are not implemented or implemented only to a certain extent in the ESF Monitoring Committees)
- There are some examples of good practices, e.g. the partnership principle included in the law in Poland, Managing Authorities who are nurturing a culture of involving social partners in their work.

Based on the findings, [the report](#) gives suggestions for improvement in the implementation of the ECCP: Capacity building support should be given to social partners (2% of the ESF should be allocated to capacity building); training should be organized for Monitoring Committees; social partners should be involved in all stages of programme cycles (including the planning stage); Monitoring Committees should ensure transparency in order to allow for the equitable representation of all social partners; and, exchange of knowledge and good practices should be strengthened.

Presentation: https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/filedepot_download/2692/2166 (copy the link to browser)

3. Civil society strengthening and partnership, Civil Society Futures Inquiry

Andy Churchill from Network for Europe presented [the report on the Civil Society Futures Inquiry](#). The report looks at the situation of civil society in England by analyzing 7 themes/trends (social fracturing, environmental pressures, structural changes, economic restructuring, personal precarity, changing nature of place, global volatility). The objective of the report is to stimulate thinking around the question on how civil society can become a strong actor in responding to global challenges. In order to ensure future developments based on the democratic principles of inclusion and sustainability, civil society should lead the change in power relations (shared and distributed models of decision-making), accountability (accountability to people and communities), connections (closer and meaningful interpersonal and intercommunal relations) and trust maximization.

Presentation: https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/filedepot_download/2692/2160 (copy the link to browser)

4. Participatory evaluation of partnership: Interactive session with the Partnership Learning Loop (PLL)

Helga van Kampen and Rita Dieleman from the [Partnership Learning Loop](#) presented the methodology for an evaluation of the partnership process with the aim of understanding the added value of working in partnership.

An example was provided of the evaluation process that is being carried out by the Partnership Learning Loop in a collaboration between the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and CSOs (chief strategy officers) of Dutch companies and their partners (Policy review of civil society strengthening). The evaluation process involved desk research on the perception of partnership; a kick-off meeting with Dutch CSOs; designing the survey; interviews in different countries; a feedback meeting to discuss the findings of the survey and to shape future steps, and a final report.

Evaluation of the partnership process should consider the following aspects (Analysis framework of the partnership process): 1. Set-up and design of partnership (how partnership was designed according to partners); 2. Daily operations (how partnership works in practice); 3. Results of partnership (what do we want to achieve with partnership?); 4. Added value (what is the added value of partnership?); 5. Collaborative mindset (is there a joint understanding based on transparency, diverse representation and equity?). Each of these elements has a set of Key Partnership Success Indicators which can be evaluated through various processes, for example: 1. desk research, 2. A kick-off meeting, 3. A survey, 4. A dashboard analysis 5. Conversations and 6. A feedback meeting.

Presentation: https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/filedepot_download/2692/2163 (copy the link to browser)

Comment: Example of ESF Flanders: Partnership is obligatory for transnational projects and ESF Flanders provides coaching to partners in the project prior to submission of their project proposal; coaching is also provided during the implementation phase.

4.1. Working in groups

Participants continued with discussions in groups on how best to evaluate the quality of the partnerships in which they are involved. The discussion was based on two questions:

1. What questions would you like to ask members of the partnerships you are involved in or you support?
2. What would help you to have the partnership process on the agenda?

Group 1: Quality aspects of partnership

- It is important that partners know each other
- Partnership should be seen as important, obligatory
- Partners must feel that they are consulted
- The process of involving people in partnership is important
- Monitoring of the implementation of partnership (mutual accountability of partners)
- Clear goals for partnership need to be set
- Initiative should be with the Managing Authority
- The 'leaders' should be involved in partnership (the ones that create partnership should be involved)

Group 2: Question for evaluating the quality of partnership

- What results do we expect to get from partnership?
- Have we fulfilled expected responsibilities?
- What are our incentives for partnership? (only financial or also something else?)
- How is power distributed?
- How is leadership exercised?
- Is partnership sustainable?

5. Place-based partnerships: Local Community Development in Rural Ireland

Michelle McDonagh from Pobal gave an overview of the historical development of local community partnerships in Ireland. In 1980s, the community and volunteer sector started to develop and support for this development was given by the EU funding (European Poverty Programmes; Horizon and Now). In 1990, the National Community Programme was established. Local development was strengthened with the LEADER programme and Rural Action Groups in 1991 and in 1993 with the Programme for Economic and Social Progress. In 2005, Local Development Companies were put in place and in 2011 a Programme for Government was adopted. The latter established Local Community Development Committees and a Public Participation Network. A Local Economic and Community plan for 6 years was put in place. In 2015, a Framework Policy for Local and Community Development was adopted.

An example of good practice is the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) that is co-funded by the ESF and managed by 33 Local Community Development Committees.

Presentation: https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/filedepot_download/2692/2161 (copy the link to browser)

Finbarr Felan from Sligo Local Community Development Committee presented the local community partnership in Sligo, Ireland. Sligo Local Community Development Committee has 17 members (8 from public sector and 9 from private sector) and 5 subcommittees. The Committee ensures the implementation of the Local Economic and Community Plan by involving local actors.

In the 2014-2020 period, the LEADER Rural Development Programme has played an important role in local development of Sligo (with contracts issued to 66 projects to date).

Finbarr gave examples of projects that were supported by the Sligo Local Community Development Committee: 1. Soccer team project (Ballisodare United) combines LEADER funding with private loan (Clann Credo Laon) and funding from a disability organisation (FAI Funding); 2. SICAP (Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme) Project 'Self-employment Network' (discussion groups for unemployed persons looking for self-employment); 3. Peace IV Programme on three strands (children and youth, on building positive relations, and on shared spaces and services) ; 4. Public Participation Network (PPN) on active citizenship.

Presentation: https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/filedepot_download/2692/2162 (copy the link to browser)

6. Territories Without Long-Term Unemployed (Territoires Zéro Chômeur De Longue Durée)

Sophie Hermant from [Territoires Zéro Chômeur De Longue Durée](#) presented a partnership-based project on labour integration of long-term unemployed persons in local communities in France. The project started as an experiment in 1995 in Seiches-sur-le-Loir, France and now has 4 phases: 1. Development of consensus (involvement of all people in the community) 2. Meeting with people (identifying the needs of people) 3. The creation of Structures for Employment Purposes (SEP). A job is offered to and created for a person based on their individual interest, motivation and ability, in coordination with a Local Community for Employment (LCE).

Local NGOs or politicians are initiators of the project in local communities and are mediators between local employers.

At the moment, the project is implemented to 10 communities but there are plans to extend it to 50 communities in France. The ESF will be approached to support this scale-up.

Presentation: https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/filedepot_download/2692/2164 (copy the link to browser)

7. Interactive exercise: What are the key ingredients for successful place-based partnership?

Based on insights received from presentations, meeting participants were asked to highlight key elements for successful place-based partnership:

- Knowledge and experience
- Community and beneficiary participation and planning
- Political will and involvement for the right reasons
- Identification of needs
- Leadership
- To accept that not everyone wants to be involved
- Reach out to key motivators/drivers
- Clear strategy
- Enabling environment (policy)
- Cooperation/volunteer culture
- Private/business engagement
- A context based approach

8. Working session: Update of the Guidebook on How ESF Managing Authorities and Intermediate Bodies support Partnership

Participants of the meeting were asked to provide comments on the draft [Guidebook](#) that was produced by Community of Practice (CoP) on Partnership in 2008.

Participants proposed selected examples of partnerships from different Member States.

9. Update on the Network activities

Participants received an update about the upcoming meetings and ongoing work of the network:

- 2nd Mini Peer Review in Autonomous Province of Trento (Italy) in April 2019
- 3rd Peer Review on involvement of Social Partners in Brussels in June 2019
- Ongoing work on the Partnership in EU Funds and Programmes
- Joint meeting with Thematic Network on Public Administration and Governance in April 2019. The theme of the meeting is citizens' participation in public decision-making.
- ESF Transnational Platform Annual Conference on 21st and 22nd of May 2019