

11th Meeting of Thematic Network on Inclusion

17-18 June 2019, Brussels

Minutes

Summary

The 11th meeting of the Thematic Network on Inclusion of the ESF Transnational Platform took place on the 17th and 18th June 2019 in Brussels (Belgium). On the first day, the TN held a joint conference with the European Commission's Mutual Learning Programme on the topic of de-institutionalisation (DI) and how EU funding instruments can support the development of community-based services. The second day of the meeting was devoted to an evaluation of the activities and results of the TN.

The conference placed emphasis on the role played by people with support needs in shaping the support and services received in community-based settings. Transnational exchange was pointed out as a key driver of DI, both as a channel of mutual learning and a tool for project development. ESF has been a game-changer in the promotion of DI. However, it is key that progress is continued and that existing good practices contribute to build a systematic approach towards DI that includes prevention. The ESF+ proposal aims at supporting this pathway underpinned by a rights-based approach (European Pillar of Social Rights, UNCRPD). Two specific dimensions of community-based services, such as personal assistance and early intervention, were addressed with practice presentations. Following this, recommendations to advance DI at different levels were developed.

On the second day, an evaluation session assessed the work of the TN in the present round of transnational cooperation. Building on the results of a survey conducted among members, the thematic focus and working methods of the TN were examined. Also, ideas and proposals for the future of the network were put forward.

Learning and results

- EU funding has been key to promote DI across Member States. DI is not limited to the closing down of large institutions; it calls for a paradigm change that brings care and social services closer to people and communities.
- The proposal for a new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2021-2027 aims to continue supporting DI. Member States should seize this opportunity to mainstream community-based approaches to service provision in their Operational Programmes.
- As regards the future of the TN, members should communicate the positive outcomes and added value of transnational cooperation. This is crucial to ensure future engagement and put social inclusion objectives at the heart of the next round of transnational cooperation.

Day 1 – 17 June 2019

Agenda: https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/filedepot_download/2741/2259

Fintan Farrell, Thematic Expert on Inclusion, highlighted that the conference brings together two strands of work. On the one hand, the awareness raising activity carried out by the Mutual Learning Services and, on the other hand, the work of the TN on Inclusion of the ESF Transnational Platform on the topic of DI.

In her opening remarks, Maria-Anna Paraskeva (DG EMPL) emphasised the key role played by ESIF in the progress made on DI. She also stressed the importance of building capacity at national level in order to provide stakeholders with the tools to monitor progress and flag issues around DI as they arise.

Next, Milan Šveřepa (Inclusion Europe and the European Expert Group on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care - EEG) acknowledged progress made but pointed out some key challenges. In this regard, transition towards community-based services has stalled in some countries. Also, DI has in some cases resulted in cherry picking of some target groups over others. Emphasis should be given to the prevention of institutionalisation, crucially by making services and support available.

Loris di Pietrantonio (DG EMPL, presentation: <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/library?cid=502&fid=2439>) next described how ESF+ will continue promoting the transition towards community-based services. In this regard, the alignment of ESF+ priorities with the European Pillar of Social Rights should represent a guarantee of stepped up action towards DI in the next programming period.

1. Overview of the State of Play in Europe and selected countries

1.1. Astrid Podsiadlowski (Fundamental Rights Agency): From institutions to community living for persons with disabilities. A European perspective

Presentation: <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/library?cid=502&fid=2443>

Ms Podsiadlowski presented the results of the FRA research project [From institutions to community living](#), which consists of a series of publications looking at the main drivers and barriers to DI. The project is focused on the experience in 5 Member States (BG, FI, IE, IT and SK).

1.2. Sina Lipp, Neunerhaus Moving towards “Housing First” for homeless people in Austria

Presentation: <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/library?cid=502&fid=2448>

Neunerhaus provides services to people experiencing homelessness and other forms of social exclusion in Vienna, where housing assistance is still dominated by a multi-stepped approach towards permanent accommodation. Neunerhaus instead applies a Housing First approach whereby access to affordable housing is provided as a starting point, and people have more freedom of choice.

1.3. Slavenka Martinovic, Community-based services for children without adequate parental care in Croatia

Presentation: <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/library?cid=502&fid=2449>

Poverty, ethnic origin and disability are factors contributing to the institutionalisation of children today. Ms Martinovic pointed out that lack of political commitment impairs effective DI in Croatia. Actions should prevent the separation of children from families, increase support to families and prepare young people to leave supported environments. ESIF are key to re-train staff, develop community-based services, support and monitor foster families and develop new infrastructures.

Questions/comments:

According to the FRA research, support to DI is challenged in some countries. > No actors question DI. However, questions around DI arise for some groups of people; e.g. old people or people with complex needs. Also, people with disabilities and their families may question the

effectiveness of DI if services or support are not available. The right to independent living is crucial but it must be underpinned by adequate services and funding.

In this regard, COFACE stressed the need to invest in new generation services that are able to drive the transition to community-based services. Families constitute a key link with the community and support to them should be at the heart of such a service mix.

SMES: The concept of institution or DI may differ across countries and stakeholders. For this reason, it is important to develop this concept with notions of independent life and participation. In response to this, however, ENIL emphasised that terminology and guidance on how to implement DI are clearly spelled out in art. 19 of the UNCRPD.

ENIL also pointed out the links between austerity measures and (re)institutionalisation in Western Europe. When services are not available or accessible, there is a risk of DI reversal.

2. Parallel Session A: Use of Personal Assistance

The session had a focus on personal assistance as a key enabler of independent living. Frank Sioen (ENIL) introduced the concept (art. 19 of the UNCRPD). Personal assistance must be personal and built in a dialogue between the user and the provider; also, it must be controlled by the user – e.g. funds should be made available to the user without any intermediary-.

2.1. Orlando Costa (Instituto Nacional para a Reabilitação): Practice in the area of personal assistance in Portugal

Presentation: <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/library?cid=502&fid=2438>

The Portuguese model of personal assistance is underpinned by an ESF-funded pilot project (2017-2020) whereby support is provided to a people with disabilities in their daily activities. Personal assistants receive a salary of EUR 900 per month (for 40 hours per week).

Questions/comments:

How is personal assistance ensured when users need support for more than 40 hours per week?
> Support from more than one person can be requested.

2.2. Ingrid Mangulson (Ministry of Social Affairs): Community-based services and DI in Estonia: an ESF project

Presentation: <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/library?cid=502&fid=2529>

In Estonia, DI has been underpinned by the closing of institutions and the building of small, family-type homes in communities. In addition, new and stepped up independent living supportive services (including personal assistance) have been developed, also with a focus on prevention. The model is based on cooperation with local governments and ESF support has been key to drive such a process. A pilot project (2017-2018, EUR 150 000 in 8 municipalities) has assessed local capacity to evaluate and organise support and services for people with psychosocial or special intellectual needs.

Questions/comments:

ENIL: on the one hand, you have smaller house units and, on the other hand, you have personal assistance. Are these two separate systems? > The aim is to integrate both because family homes are a local competence whilst support services are provided at national level.

2.3. Noor Seghers (KU Leuven): Personal assistant “To be or not to be”

Presentation: <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/library?cid=502&fid=2444>

Flanders introduced personal budgets for people with disabilities in 2017 (available for minors from 2020). This means that people receive cash or vouchers to buy services such as personal assistance, which can be provided by relatives. The project 'To be or not to be' promotes informed decisions by showing the costs and benefits of becoming the personal assistant of a relative. Transnational cooperation has been a very important resource of the project because partnerships with other countries have helped informal carers emerge as a visible group.

Questions/comments:

Participants asked how the appropriate use of personal assistance money is monitored? > There is an obligation to report on how budgets are spent. Also, misuse of money by relatives is prevented by encouraging people with disabilities to speak up and address potential issues with their personal assistants.

In his **reaction** to the practices presented in the panel, **João Varela** from the **Centro de Vida Independente in Portugal** emphasised how personal assistance is more cost-effective than keeping people in institutions. Therefore, keeping institutions open means making less resources available for community-based services. Financial considerations should nevertheless be secondary, since access to personal assistance should be addressed as a social imperative.

3. Parallel Session B: Early Intervention

In her introduction, Katerina Nanou (Eurochild) emphasised that early intervention is key to prevent institutionalisation and, therefore, ensure a transition from a system that violates the rights of children – and other groups - to one which enables them.

3.1. Bénédicte Kail (APF France Handicap): Supporting the family carers. 'RePairs Aidants'

Presentation: <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/library?cid=502&fid=2441>

'RePairs Aidants' is a support scheme in France that trains family carers of people with disabilities to address the different dimensions of their caring responsibilities.

Questions/comments:

Participants pointed out that sometimes the interaction between professional carers and family carers may be difficult. > Building a collaborative approach is essential.

3.2. Ljiljana Ban (FICE Croatia): 'One Moment' project

Presentation: <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/library?cid=502&fid=2441>

Ljiljana Ban next presented the "One Moment" project in Croatia. With support from the ESF, it aims to support family and community life for children and young people with behavioural problems and children and young people without adequate parental care. It is underpinned by the renting and purchase of small-family houses for the service of organised living, a daycare service, and counselling services or the establishment of a mobile team to increase the reach of activities.

Questions/comments:

Participants asked the extent to which users are free to come and go from their dwelling. > They have complete freedom to do this but only once support from services has been ensured.

As regards the payment of rent, Ms Ban mentioned that this is covered fully by the project funds without co-sharing with users or their families. Participants also stressed the need to ensure that the buildings vacated by the process of DI are not used for new forms of institutionalisation.

3.2. Gonçalo Solla (Fundação LIGA): ‘Senior Club’

Presentation: <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/library?cid=502&fid=2445>

Mr Solla described the activities of the Senior Club, which aims to promote active and integrated ageing in community life among older people, prevent isolation and social exclusion, and maintain personal autonomy through the stimulation of physical, cognitive and social skills.

Questions/comments:

Participants underscored how the project dealt with older people as resources and an added value to community life, rather than as a population group with service needs only. On the other hand, participants questioned the condition to enjoy full physical and psychic independence to become part of the Club, as this may exclude a sizeable part of the target group from the service.

4. EU funding instruments for transition to community-based care and support in the future funding period

4.1. Andor Urmos, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)

Presentation: <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/library?cid=502&fid=2446>

Mr Urmos highlighted how in the next programming period ESI Funds (and ERDF and ESF+ in particular) will share the objective of continued support to DI. Enabling conditions, both in their horizontal (EU Charter of Human Rights and UNCRPD) and thematic dimensions, underpin such a commitment. In addition, the closer link with the European Semester will guarantee that CSRs are taken into account when programming - at the start (art. 8 CPR) and during mid-term evaluation (art. 14 CPR) - and on an ongoing basis in ESF+ (art. 7. 2). In addition, reinforced partnership should be a lever for DI through the promotion of social inclusion, non-discrimination and the rights of persons with disabilities.

4.2. Maria-Anna Paraskeva: The ESF and other structural and cohesion funds

Presentation: <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/library?cid=502&fid=2442>

Ms Paraskeva took stock of ESF action towards DI in the current programming period. DI goals have been reinforced in ESF+ regulation, which enshrines its aim to support to the transition from residential/institutional care to family and community-based care (recital 18), has a specific objective on access to quality, sustainable and affordable services (art. 4) and aims to ensure equal opportunities and non-discrimination (art. 6 – general provisions). Ms Paraskeva underscored the need to bring into play programmes such as InvestEU and pointed out that emphasis placed in result orientation should not be used to justify ‘one size fits all’ approaches to the design and delivery of community-based services. In the same vein, simplified models (and simplified cost options in particular) should be looked at carefully.

Questions/comments:

Participants underscored the positive element represented by the commitment in ESF+ to an ongoing revision of enabling conditions. However, where lies the responsibility to monitor their fulfillment? > At the beginning of OPs, alignment with ex-ante conditionalities was regarded as a box ticking exercise. This is not the case anymore and ex-ante conditionalities are in every case underpinned by the Charter of Fundamental Rights; infringements to it will be a strong element in

the revision. Also, in order to ensure effective monitoring, transparency is key and should be improved. In this regard, CSOs with data and knowledge of the situation on the ground are called upon to share such evidence with the EC, who will then be in a more informed position to assess compliance with enabling conditions.

What happens in countries where DI is not mentioned in annex 4 of the Country Reports or that do not receive CSRs on the topic? > Even if DI is not mentioned, issues around health and long-term care are often flagged in the framework of the European Semester. This should be a channel to integrate DI priorities.

Participants also mentioned the effects of the interruption of ESF support, which often leads to service unavailability. In this regard, considerations on sustainability in the long-run should factor in as a pre-condition for ESF support.

5. Working group 1: Next steps to move away from institutional care to independent living and community-based care

Participants next discussed recommendations for stepped actions towards mainstreaming community-based services addressed at different levels.

The EU level should
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share good practices and contribute to their scaling up in order to promote a paradigm change. • Train EC officials at the ESF geographical desks, as well as in other policy fields, on DI. • EC involvement in DI should start from the beginning, ensuring with MS that funding is adequate to sustain DI efforts. Monitoring, including through the European Semester, should aim at ensuring adequate progress. • Promote awareness raising and mainstreaming of DI and related concepts. • Promote meaningful space for CSOs and DPOs in monitoring DI progress.
The national level should
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish coordination mechanisms between the national and local levels. • Invest in consistent, comparable statistics with homogeneous terminology. • Promote community-based approaches to project implementation. • Create enabling conditions for a co-production approach where all relevant stakeholders are involved in a meaningful way. • Create the conditions for interinstitutional cooperation on DI and ensure consistency across departments. • Promote the involvement of people with support needs and their local communities throughout the planning, implementation and monitoring of entire deinstitutionalisation process. • Promote awareness raising and sensitise communities on DI. • Ensure that DI processes do not give priority to some target groups over others or exclude people, such as migrants. • Need to reinforce investments on prevention as a cost-effective measure.
Civil Society Organisations should
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring in all DI actors (not only persons with disabilities; also children, old people, etc.) • Give a voice to people in institutions. • Promote support to self-advocacy groups. • Map available programmes, tools and promote integrated approaches. • Promote e-learning opportunities, also to match project partners. • Act as DI watchdogs, carrying out alternative reporting and provide evidence that contrasts established 'facts and figures'. • Break down silos in policy discussions; DI is linked to accessibility, social policies, education policies, etc.

6. Working group 2: Collaborating transnationally to design community-based services to support independent living

A new exchange among small groups aimed at finding ideas for transnational projects that could be supported through EU funds.

Project proposals

- Development of **quality standards in childcare** (mapping of best practices, develop exchange, develop quality standards, organise capacity building on how to enforce these).
- Creation of **national networks of experts on DI** to ensure mainstreaming of DI and related concepts, advise public authorities, promote awareness at regional and local levels and create partnerships with key stakeholders (service providers, academics, national human rights institutes, etc.)
- Focus on transition points to **prevent (re)institutionalisation of young adults**: key partnerships with communities receiving young people, institutions to identify beneficiaries, housing and education providers, public employment services.
- Strengthen the **voice of persons with disabilities**, in particular those experiencing homelessness and institutionalisation. A 'train the trainer' approach should be followed.
- **Support to care leavers**, with promotion of transnational exchange based on successful experiences (the REC funded [Leaving Care](#) project in Austria – SOS International - could be used as an example).
- International **mobility of persons with disabilities** on how to promote independent living through Erasmus.
- Mainstreaming of community-based features in **curricula for professional carers in universities and schools**: include modules, check that existing contents are 'community-based proof'. Key partnership with universities, Ministries of Education, users and families.

7. Magdi Birtha, Key messages and reflections

Presentation: <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/library?cid=502&fid=2436>

Ms Birtha summarised the main takeaways of the day. With regard to EU funding, she emphasised the need to establish increased synergies between ESF and ERDF, and other programmes. She highlighted key areas for attention in the next MFF, such as the proposed 25% earmarked for social inclusion, the monitoring of enabling conditions on an ongoing basis or the move towards simplification and result orientation, which should not lower quality standards. Finally, Ms Birtha stressed that, in spite of the crucial role played by ESIF, these should work hand in hand with national funding to ensure sustainability in efforts towards community-based services.

8. Conclusions

Maria-Anna Paraskeva emphasised the importance of partnerships and encouraged stakeholders to ensure their presence in ESF monitoring committees. In addition, DG EMPL is committed to reviewing the ECCP and will seek the support of other relevant DGs in this process. According to her, transnational cooperation is core to promote DI and the topic should continue to be addressed in future TN work. Ms Paraskeva mentioned that the outcomes of the meeting would be shared at the upcoming ESF Committee meeting on 20th June.

Mr Farrell thanked participants and speakers for their contributions. The conference concludes the work of the TN on DI in the current round of transnationality. The outcomes and learnings achieved so far should lie at the base of future work on the topic.

Day 2 – 18 June 2019

Patrizia Brandellero, facilitator of the day, presented the agenda and objectives of the evaluation session.

9. Fintan Farrell, Overview of activities and results of TNI

Presentation: <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/library?cid=503&fid=2451>

In his presentation, Mr Farrell took stock of the work of the TN, which has been focused on three key topics: active inclusion, homelessness and DI. In addition to these, the TN has developed cross-cutting themes such as soft indicators for social inclusion in ESF, social innovation and gender equality. Mr Farrell summarised the main outputs and outcomes of the TN and stressed the key importance of a participatory, bottom-up approach to its work.

10. Group work: appreciative inquiry exercise

Building on the initial input, participants were asked to reflect on the history of the TN, pick a highlight and reflect on the learnings drawn from it. Some milestones were mentioned:

- Trainings on DI, Estonian Presidency conference and Romanian Presidency event. In this regard, the involvement of stakeholders (EEG and member organisations) was key. Also, linking with high-level events gave higher impact to the work of the TN.
- Study visits in Brno on homelessness was an opportunity to engage service users.
- Rights-based approach to work on homelessness (e.g. Bill of Rights in Poland).
- Discussion on soft indicators triggered a reflection on the meaning of social inclusion.

Discussion:

Participants underlined that a common ingredient of success for the TN was the atmosphere of trust and openness in which the discussions and work within the TN had developed. Time and effort was needed to build such an environment but it paid off. Participants stressed the importance of communicating the achievements of the TN showing its value added in order to ensure ownership and engagement in the future.

11. Patrizia Brandellero: Brief overview of evaluation survey feedback

Presentation: <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/library?cid=503&fid=2450>

Ms Brandellero shared the results of a survey conducted ahead of the session among TN members. Twelve responses were received (half came from MAs and a quarter from NGOs; the rest from 'others'). Most respondents reported a high level of satisfaction with the work of the TN in meeting its objectives of facilitating transnational exchange, supporting transnational coordinated calls and enabling stakeholder engagement. Respondents also gave some recommendations. As regards processes, the need to have an early and targeted definition of objectives and activities was mentioned. Some respondents also stressed the importance of involving actors with specific expertise on each different topic (relevant authorities, stakeholders). As regards content and thematic focus, respondents pointed out that work around three pillars was an opportunity for more specific focus in TN meetings.

Discussion:

ESF BEfr: Gender was reported as the horizontal objective that was least met. In fact, gender should have been further mainstreamed and made more visible, through specific topics and

across all the work. In some cases, study visits failed to bring the intended hands on approach (e.g. 8th Meeting in Madrid on Active Inclusion). It would be interesting to have more study visits and use them as a starting point for discussion or a red thread in meetings. However, visiting some of the target groups might prove challenging.

ENIL: the term good practice can be misleading. Some of the examples presented are promising ones or work in progress. However, they have an important added value and are part of learning exercises.

EAPN: it may be difficult to present the work of the TN to hierarchies, especially when it is part of a learning process. It would be interesting to know more on how other TN members approach this. Also, the time and resources needed to follow closely the work of the TN make it difficult for NGOs to be fully involved.

As regards stakeholder involvement, Mr Farrell clarified that the objective of having targeted participation according to themes was not always understood. At the Member State level, the network of key contact points was responsible for choosing relevant participants in each occasion.

12. Group work. From evaluation to recommendations

Building on their initial assessment, participants discussed further in small groups and shared the following views and recommendations for the future.

Recommendations and ideas for the future

- Lack of activity between meetings, made these one-off occasions. This prevented increased connection between TN work and members' daily work.
- Links between the three thematic areas were not always clear (silos).
- Study visits bring value and are important as reality checks.
- Links with NGOs and key stakeholders should continue, with stepped up efforts to engage the relevant stakeholders on each occasion.
- TN members should be proactive at flagging challenges faced in terms of process and defining the terms of reference of the network.
- The system of Key Contact Points is positive but works best when they are engaged and active. In some cases, sending information to a functional mailbox would ensure continuity.
- There should be increased ownership from MAs.
- It would be useful to develop national platforms in each Member State. This could ease follow up as well as the selection of participants.
- Preparatory work ahead of meeting (documents, notes) could add focus and insight to discussions.
- Time should be reserved for work and development of transnational calls. The TN could, for example, provide some space for project fairs and matching of project partners.
- Greater involvement from authorities responsible for policy development would add impact to TN work.
- The voice of ESF beneficiaries should be strengthened.

Looking ahead, participants discussed some strategic future challenges for the operationalisation of social inclusion priorities in ESF (and ESF+). In this regard, enabling conditions in ESF+ will have a dynamic nature and be reviewed on an ongoing basis. As underscored in the conference of the previous day, this will call for strong monitoring from all relevant stakeholders.

Also, the tighter links with the European Semester were discussed. In this regard, participants pointed out the need that the EC also monitors progress in a positive manner, acknowledging positive change and validating effective efforts undertaken at Member State level. Participants discussed the potential role of transnational cooperation in this framework. In this regard, engaging European Semester Officers in Member States and the ESF geographical desks would increase awareness of challenges faced at national level and how ESF is addressing these.

13. Closing and next steps

Ms Brandellero thanked participants for their participation and valuable input, which will be analysed and form the base of future TN Inclusion work. Mr Farrell acknowledged the achievements made by the TN in the present round of transnational cooperation and looked forward to a prompt resumption of its activities.