EDITORIAL

Work gets under way for the second round of calls

Another co-ordinated call for projects is due in 2018, and the ESF Transnational Platform’s mutual learning networks are getting to grips with some thorny policy issues.

This third issue of our Newsletter takes stock of the progress that the nine ESF transnational thematic networks have made over the last year. Each of them involves on average 10 Member States and five other stakeholders, and their mutual learning is addressing some crucial policy issues: how to reach excluded young people who are ‘below the radar’; how to move from institutional to community-based care; how to support green growth. Common issues are emerging across the networks, such as integrated service provision.

Work has started to prepare for the second round of co-ordinated calls for proposals, to take place in 2018. At least 10 Member States will be taking part. To ensure coordination, the Platform has established an Impact Task Force, which will involve at least 20 countries, and is continuing its capacity-building work.

A date for your diary
Our annual conference will be held on 1-2 June 2017, in Brussels. We promise a varied menu of inspiring debate and practical workshops, and hope to see you there.
The ESF Transnational Platform’s nine thematic networks have now reached cruising speed and are making good progress across the board. 2017 is a crucial year for the future of mutual learning as well as calls for proposals, so now is a good time to review the advances the networks have made and look at their plans.

**Employment network – cooperating with the public employment services on a joint approach to unemployment**

Following a meeting in Paris in December, the employment thematic network and the European Public Employment Services (PES) Network are currently discussing cooperation on one-stop shops and single points of contact. The network’s experts Allen Mercer and Mike Campbell tell us more.

While cooperation between the ESF and the PESs is already happening nationally and regionally, the idea being investigated is that at European level the PESs would spearhead initiatives to combat unemployment while the ESF would help make it a reality.

As Allen Mercer explains, there is an urgent need to come up with more tailor-made options to deal with the long-term unemployed and other disadvantaged groups on the labour market. “The hope is for a more efficient use of resources, expertise and skills on both parts,” he says. The ESF has developed approaches and techniques that could help the PESs to integrate the more disadvantaged groups into jobs more successfully. The Employment network could also help on the policy side and in identifying what policies would really make a difference and should be included when developing a one-stop shop.

Meanwhile the PESs are essential in terms of delivery. “INTREO, recently introduced in Ireland, is an interagency agreement in Ireland to have a single point of contact for all people in terms of unemployment benefits and social services. If we wanted to introduce a similar system elsewhere, we could not do this without the services of the PES,” says Mike Campbell. “A collaboration between the two entities is central to the work that the European Commission is doing on employment” – not only in terms of one-stop shops but also in implementing the EU’s most challenging initiatives such as the Youth Guarantee and the Job Integration Agreements.

Other topics that might be tackled cooperatively include outreach, profiling, benchmarking and improving service quality. “A core element of all of these activities will be mutual learning where it is expected that the
ESF’s transnational activities will be useful to the PESs in developing new approaches and new opportunities for staff.” More detailed proposals for cooperation should be produced for consideration in early 2017.

**Inclusion – using transnationality to make an impact**

The aim of the network on Inclusion is not to reinvent the wheel but rather to build on existing work and make it more visible, explain experts Fintan Farrell and Patrizia Brandellero.

Following two meetings to frame the network, members decided to focus on three themes: integrated approaches to active inclusion, deinstitutionalisation and combating discrimination and promoting the inclusion of marginalised groups experiencing poverty and social exclusion. For each theme the approach will be the same: members will work towards a common understanding of the different concepts and will develop guidance on how ESF funding can be used most effectively.

The first topic to be addressed is deinstitutionalisation, and a meeting on the topic was held in January which was attended by 72 people from 13 Member States. The idea was to agree on a common understanding of the concepts of independent living and deinstitutionalisation. “These concepts can differ from country to country so developing a common understanding is vital to having a deeper exchange” says Mr Farrell.

**The added value of mutual learning**

Getting people out of institutions and into community-based care is attracting a lot of attention, which is reflected in the fact that the Estonian EU Presidency will host a conference on this issue on 12 and 13 October 2017. The event will demonstrate the added value of mutual learning in forming EU policy, an issue close to the heart of the network members. “Often by seeing what is happening elsewhere you get a better picture of what is happening in your own country. Mutual learning is about acquiring a different perspective and informing your own country that the way you do things is not the only way things can be done,” Mr Farrell says. Since a lot of money is invested in inclusion, there is a big added value in ensuring that the ESF is as efficient as possible.

The topic of reaching marginalised groups will be addressed on 27 and 28 April, at a meeting on the sustainable inclusion of homeless people, where Mr Farrell expects a high attendance, particularly as stakeholders and relevant officials from DG REGIO and DG EMPL will be on the panel. The chairs plan to develop the third topic on integrated approaches before the summer. The idea is to have three meetings and a study trip for each topic.

**Outreach and activation**

Service integration is only one of the network’s priority topics, the other two being outreach and client activation. As part of its outreach work package, the network is looking at ways to bring NEETs back into the system. This means establishing where the NEETs are, why they are not in the system, what is the best way to start the initial conversation and build trust, and who is best placed to do that. “This is harder than it looks,” says Mr Adams. “Finding ways to involve those difficult to reach is not easy, but Finland is doing it and avoiding ineffective cross-cutting conversations in the process.”

Client activation, meanwhile, is all about establishing what the individual NEET is good at to help him/her find a job or a vocational training course. Since most NEETs are by definition unqualified, a majority of jobs are out of their reach, and this is a reality check that often comes as a shock to those young people. Key to this is using a positive asset-based approach. “It’s about not looking at what they can’t do but focusing instead on what they can do. NEETs do not always realise they have talent because most soft skills are not formally recognised. Hacking and gaming are classic examples,” Mr Adams explains. As part of this work package the
network will focus on reframing conversations so that more employers see the potential benefits of employing NEETs. A meeting on this is planned for May in the Czech Republic.

**Learning and Skills network: aiming to do things differently**

Armelle Ledan, thematic expert on learning and skills, believes more cooperation and innovative working methods are key to achieving better results.

Despite all the effort and money that the EU and Member States have spent on learning and skills in recent years, the same challenges remain. For Armelle Ledan, this means “we need to innovate and look at ways of doing things differently. Financial support is vital but social innovation is probably just as important in finding new ways to tackle the learning and skills challenges.”

Keen to ensure her network rises to the occasion and remains relevant to the issues facing Member States, Ledan is paying particular attention to boosting cooperation both within and beyond the network and is focusing on substance and real, specific case studies.

Within the network, participants have expressed the wish to have more countries on board and particularly older Member States who could share their experiences and stimulate mutual learning. Germany is a big favourite for its implementation of Industrie 4.0 (the current trend towards automation and data exchange in manufacturing technologies – including cyber-physical systems, the internet of things and cloud computing) as are Austria (for its updated learning system), Estonia (for its digital expertise) France (for its CLEA initiative targeting the unemployed and focusing on key competences), Scotland (for its employability pipeline) Slovakia (for its recent introduction of dual systems of VET) and also the Netherlands, Spain and Sweden.

Ms Ledan wants the network to focus on building best practices in an innovative way. In order to avoid generic discussions on broad topics, the network will address the more urgent and burning issues. Each meeting will consist of a study visit linked to one of the priorities of the work programme. Members will be asked to present one or two case studies from their countries using videos as much as possible “to make it more interesting and avoid reports and boring formats.”

**Boosting the visibility of the Social Economy network**

The Social Economy network has been looking at ways to stimulate engagement in new Member States and boost its visibility. The network’s recent participation in a Slovak EU presidency conference has achieved both, says Dorotea Daniele.

The Slovak EU Presidency conference: Social Economy as a key player in providing effective answers to current societal challenges in the EU and the world took place in Bratislava at the end of November.

During the opening session, Slovakia’s Prime Minister, Robert Fico, and Spain’s Employment and Social Security Minister, Fatima Báñez, both stressed that transnational cooperation needed to be enhanced as mutual learning through the network is key to boosting the social economy.

It is generally accepted that transnational learning is one of the main strengths of the network, which has a long tradition of peer review. This is important because, while most Member States support the concept of the social economy, only a limited number have much experience of it in practice. Exchanging information on best practices is therefore essential to disseminate the excellent results that initiatives in Poland, Sweden, Denmark, Italy, Croatia and Spain, among others, have achieved.

**Creating rural jobs**

During the conference, the Social Economy network ran a workshop on tools to enable social economy enterprises to grow, which include public procurement. Discussions centred on the question of how the social economy can contribute to local development and how collaboration with public authorities can help achieve this. Certainly, the social economy remains a mainly
urban phenomenon and mechanisms need to be developed to expand it in rural areas. The social economy is a driver for the development of regional employment and needs to be championed and scaled up in deprived regions and areas so that the unemployed do not have to migrate to find work.

The ten Member States present at the workshop also identified other issues that the network could address in the months to come: how to measure the impact of the social economy and how to scale it up, how to take advantage of the accelerating political dynamic in support of the sector, and how to ensure that local authorities support social entrepreneurship. Members also showed interest in developing common criteria and in looking at boosting partnerships to give the sector a European dimension.

Simplification – from science-fiction to reality

Simplification is a brand new theme in the world of transnationality and one that has attracted a lot of interest. Thematic expert Luca Santin explains what makes the network so popular and how the enthusiasm of participants has turned what was science-fiction a few months ago into concrete discussions.

The Simplification network is making unexpectedly fast progress on developing EU-level Simplified Cost Options, and is also tackling state aid, legal harmonisation, gold-plating, indicators and other thorny barriers to cutting red tape. Not only are 25 Member States taking part but participants are demanding more and longer meetings and are incredibly reactive. As a result, Mr Santin is extremely pleased with what is happening.

Less than a year into the network, members are already discussing EU-level SCOs for technical assistance, education, training for people in employment, training for unemployed and employment services – a single pathway to work. “And more is to come,” says Santin. Discussions are also moving forward on delegated acts (under article 14.1 of the ESF regulation), SCO practices, gold-plating and legal harmonisation, e-governance and e-cohesion, state aid, vouchers, reporting and indicators. “We are talking about concrete and practical stuff which is one of the main reasons why the network is so successful. We are witnessing frank and open discussions between Member States and the Commission and although there might be different interpretations of issues and solutions, people are going home with a clearer view of what is concretely happening.”

Youth Employment Thematic Network, Brussels, 10-11 March 2016
**Partnership: taking a leaf out of the Irish book**

The Partnership network, which is looking at ways to improve the connections between programmes, projects and policy, went to Dublin at the end of October. The purpose was to visit a number of projects and hear about how the Irish Ministry of Education has used partnership to support flexible policy-making. Thematic expert Leda Stott details the impact of the event on the network’s work.

Ireland has been successfully using partnership agreements since 1987 and the visit “provided a vibrant space to share experiences and innovations, and explore new ideas to impact at policy level and promote transnationality in new ways,” says Ms Stott.

The participants had two packed days. They visited a local partnership company – Ballyfermot/Chapelizod partnership – to see how partnership can be encouraged at programme level, saw a demonstration of a tool for promoting project-level links, were given a presentation on co-production, and discussed partnership policy connections with the head of Ireland’s ESF Managing Authority.

The Ballyfermot/Chapelizod partnership is implementing 11 national employment and social inclusion programmes in a disadvantaged area of some 22,000 people on the outskirts of Dublin. It uses partnership principles to leverage inter-agency working, foster community development and provide employability and lifelong learning supports directly to disadvantaged neighbourhoods and groups (the long-term unemployed, one-parent families and NEETs). The partnership works closely with and complements existing Public Employment Service (PES).

As part of the visit, the network visited an inspiring case of social innovation, the Cherry Orchard Equine Education and Training Centre, which the Partnership supports. Cherry Orchard aims to fight early school-leaving by providing training and education in a horse-centred environment. Research has shown that incorporating animals into education and employment programmes improves the outcomes for disadvantaged young people. The centre works with local schools to identify young people at risk of dropping out or of engaging in anti-social behaviour. The key idea, according to the centre’s founder Helena Moore, is to “get them before it’s too late”. Since it was set up, school attendance has gone up by 70%.

During the study trip it was decided that the network will establish two working groups focusing on: (a) promoting partnership at policy level via institutional engagement; and (b) engaging better with stakeholders. Each working group will look at these in relation to employment, youth employment, learning and skills, social inclusion or migrants. A review of the work of the working group is planned after six months to ensure that something tangible is being produced.

**Focusing on migrants as individuals as well as communities**

After consultation exercises with its members, the Migrants network has chosen to focus on four topics. Two of these look at individual migrants in the labour market while the other two look more at communities of migrants.

The first priority is **Supported Pathways to Employment** and follows the individual migrant as he or she looks for a job, enters a workplace and tries to access services such as social housing, healthcare and language tuition. The second priority, **Skills and Qualifications**, investigates a series of interventions that address the needs of both employers and job seekers. The main issue is how to validate migrants’ skills, and not to overlook the informal and soft skills that could be valuable for employers but which the standard system ignores.

The two other priorities address major societal issues. **Awareness Raising** is about tackling discrimination in recruitment and employment practices, while demonstrating the potential benefits of migrants to employers. This theme is also about involving migrants as stakeholders in the integration process. This means that, where possible, policy-makers should develop mechanisms to consult migrants on policy measures. A study visit to either the Czech Republic or Germany, is planned to delve deeper into the topic.

**Pathways to Integration and Inter-Community Liaison** looks at practices in use to mediate between migrants and the host community. Few countries have been successful in developing this function. Finland and Germany are the two Member States with the most experience in this domain but the network is keen to look at another approach currently under way in Wallonia, and a study visit should be organised shortly.

The network is supported by two experts, AEIDL’s Jyostna Patel and Rachel Marangozov of Migration-Work.
**Deinstitutionalisation** – Ensuring a life in dignity for all

*Patrizia Brandellero, supporting the Inclusion Thematic Network reports from a recent seminar on deinstitutionalisation.*

**“**Though governments increasingly recognise the inevitability of deinstitutionalisation, there is less clarity with regard to the mechanisms that replace institutionalisation and what would constitute a human rights-based response.” – Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner, 2012.

What is deinstitutionalisation (DI) and how do EU Member states go about it? What is the EU framework in which it evolves and how do the ESIFs contribute? How can we guarantee that DI is followed by a clear, rights-based approach to providing support towards a dignified and inclusive life in a community-based environment? These are some of the questions raised during the training and meeting on DI that took place in Brussels on 12 and 13 January 2017. The meetings were co-organised by the ESF Thematic Network on Inclusion (TNI), the European Expert Group on Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care (EEG) and the European Commission.

The meeting brought together over 60 participants, representing 17 Member States and including representatives from national and regional Managing Authorities of the ESF, national and European-level NGOs working on issues related to DI, as well representatives from the European Commission with country and/or policy responsibilities and allowed for networking between the different bodies on national experiences and transnational learning.

Several examples of practices were presented, which show the potential and also the risks that come with DI. Cost comparisons between institutional, family and community-based support undertaken by Lumos in Bulgaria showed the scale of the gap and the cost-efficiency of moving towards the latter.

The gathering highlighted the importance of cooperation and partnership between the different stakeholders, the participation of end beneficiaries, and a focus on prevention. The full cycle of deinstitutionalisation must come from a socially inclusive approach which holds human dignity and human rights at its heart. The debate also emphasised the need for continuous systematic data collection, for identifying key criteria for project selection, and for ring-fencing funds for DI throughout the process. Since individuals have a variety of support needs, the aim must be to make high-quality and individualised services available within the community, while continuing to make provision for mainstream services.

Members of the TNI committed to continuing their transnational exchanges on DI, to bringing the learning and focus of the discussions into their work at national level and also to seek possibilities to integrate this policy area in future ESF calls. They particularly

**Defining deinstitutionalisation**

The EEG guidelines refer to deinstitutionalisation as the process of closing institutions and developing a range of services in the community, including prevention, in order to eliminate the need for institutional care. UNICEF defines deinstitutionalisation as “the full process of planning transformation, downsizing and/or closure of residential institutions, while establishing a diversity of other child care services regulated by rights-based and outcomes-oriented standards.”

*UNICEF (2010) At Home or in a Home? Formal Care and Adoption of Children in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, https://www.unicef.org/ceecis/At_home_or_in_a_home_report.pdf, p. 52*
welcomed the commitment by the upcoming Estonian Presidency of the EU to hold a Conference on Deinstitutionalisation in Tallinn on 12-13 October 2017 as an official Presidency event. The members of the TNI will attend the event and organise a follow-up meeting on the topic around those dates.

Key guidance: Ten lessons on how to achieve community living

1. Ensure that champions for community living are involved in leading change.
2. Make the needs and preferences of people central to planning.
3. Respect the experiences and roles of families.
4. Create a real home and personalised support for each individual.
5. Focus on achieving quality services and ensuring people can lead their own lives safely.
6. Recruit and develop skilled personnel.
7. Engage a broad partnership in delivering change.
8. Establish a clear plan and timescale for creating the community services necessary to make each institution redundant.
9. Invest in communicating all this effectively to everyone affected, including in the communities to which people are moving.
10. Support each person in their transition to community living.

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Social innovation for refugees

In response to the recent wave of arrivals of asylum seekers to Europe, many social innovations, often led by ordinary citizens, have flourished. Antoine Saint-Denis draws some lessons for policy-making.

Social services in the receiving countries of the EU were largely unprepared for the stream of asylum seekers crossing the Mediterranean. They were overwhelmed by the considerable and multiple needs of these people. Thousands of NGOs and citizens mobilised and spontaneously used social media to build coalitions and organise a wide variety of services, ranging from emergency responses to more lasting initiatives. Many of them did not thrive, but many others are flourishing. This flow of social innovations arose as a result of non-existent or inadequate public services, new types of civic engagement or new communication and management opportunities offered by technology.

Three types of innovation

Among the wide variety of initiatives, it is possible to draw up a typology:

- Many services aim to improve communication by overcoming language barriers, and to deliver information about daily life, rights and duties, healthcare, education, etc. Mainstream web services such as Google Translate are widely used, but volunteer on-the-spot interpretation also plays an important role in facilitating interactions. Like many others, the Welcome Germany app delivers general and local-based information corresponding to newcomers’ most pressing needs, in the languages they are most fluent in.
Another type of initiative consists in matching offer and demand. A number of platforms, such as Comme à la maison by SINGA in France, or Takecarebnb in the Netherlands, are used successfully to organise meetings between asylum seekers and local people, thus enabling the former to start a social life and build solidarity networks.

A third type of tools focuses on the interactions between public services and people. Mobilearn is a web tool used by local authorities to deliver personalised and general officially validated information to registered migrants. Kiron’s objective is to give access to online academic learning to students who cannot immediately attend university. Some policy initiatives are on the same path. Within the Skills Agenda for Europe, the European Commission’s Skills Profile Tool for third country nationals will support early identification and profiling of skills and qualifications.

Refugees themselves have initiated – or at least are involved in – many of these innovations. Some initiatives, like morgas HOTEL in Vienna or the Cucula furniture factory in Berlin (see photo), are two examples of ways to create jobs for refugees. The impact is however much wider. These approaches protect people’s dignity and empower them, resulting in accelerated integration. They also give citizens an active role and contribute to positive perceptions towards asylum seekers in the whole society.

Work in progress

Many services are still in a development phase. This is the case for many IT applications, such as Textfugees, a promising interactive automated service available by text message or Facebook Messenger, and Virtuous Triangle from Turkey, one of the winners of the 2016 European Social Innovation Competition, which aims to pair a university student, a local and a refugee pupil for long-term support.

The fact that so many initiatives are still on their way cannot be explained only by the low quality of the concepts on which they are based or by the time it takes to transform a concept into reality. Some of the initiatives launched by volunteers will not thrive beyond the initial momentum and enthusiasm. Moreover, given that most of these initiatives depend on public generosity, sponsorship or public financing, their business model is still uncertain. Many social enterprises have invested in the sector, but building a market takes time. Ultimately, the challenge is how to best articulate different elements filling the intercultural gap, putting IT technology at the service of social work, ensuring consistency with public policy strategies.
In order to enhance the capacity of Member States to launch transnational calls and mainstream the impact of transnational activities, the ESF Transnational Platform has established an Impact Task Force, which starts operating in February 2017.

The unofficial kick-off of the new group took place on 7-8 November 2016 in Brussels during the capacity-building seminar on transnational calls for proposals, which revealed the need to work on this issue more systematically outside (but in co-operation with) the Thematic Networks.

During this participative event, participants worked through a learning manual which covered six phases of the process: institutional capacity, setting priorities, designing the call, finding partners, drawing up the Transitional Cooperation Agreement and assessing the applications. The manual is being revised and will be re-published by early March 2017.

Great job by (too) few Member States

Only 4 Member States took part in the Coordinated Call 2016: Finland, Belgium (Flanders), Poland and Sweden. In addition, transnational calls within the flexible approach were launched by Belgium (Wallonia), Bulgaria and Poland.

Applications for the Coordinated Call closed at the end of September 2016, and the provisional results are as follows:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>MA</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Budget</th>
<th>Projects submitted</th>
<th>Projects agreed</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Benl</td>
<td>employment, inclusion, youth (not mobility), learning &amp; skills, social economy, refugees</td>
<td>€2.5m</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17 (20?)</td>
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<td>FI</td>
<td>employment, inclusion, youth, learning &amp; skills</td>
<td>undefined</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL</td>
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<td>11</td>
</tr>
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<td>12</td>
<td>6/7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>€14.3m+</td>
<td>100</td>
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Given that the ESF’s total budget is some €19 billion a year, this is a disappointing outturn. To give project promoters a reasonable choice of partners, it is crucial that more Member States take part. Seminar participants concluded that not only do their technical skills need to be improved, but the policy lead needs to be stronger. Transnational projects can improve the ESF’s impact by transferring knowledge and experience from one country to another, and by developing new methods in partnership. It can be a staircase to better performance. The third factor that is necessary for a more extensive take-up of transnationality in 2018 is enough time to prepare. Participants agreed that we have to start now!
Call for action

Following the capacity building seminar, the ESF Transnational Platform prepared a survey of the Member States’ plans regarding transnational ESF projects, which the European Commission sent out in December 2016. By the end of January 2017 we received 50 responses from 23 countries. The outcomes are promising.

- Six Member States have a separate priority axis for transnational cooperation: BE, BG, CZ, ES, HU, PL
- Seventeen Member States will finance transnational projects:

  - Member States will launch the 2018 coordinated call in 7 themes:

    | Employment | BE (2 OPs), BG, EE, FI, IE, IT, PL |
    | Youth employment | BE (2 OPs), BG, EE, FI, IE, IT, SE |
    | Inclusion | BE (2 OPs), BG, FI, IE, IT, LT, PL, SE |
    | Social economy | BE (2 OPs), BG, IT, PL, SE |
    | Learning and skills | BE (2 OPs), BG, FI, IE, IT (2 OPs), PL, SE |
    | Migrants | BE (2 OPs), IE, SE |
    | Governance | BG, IT |

These are the preliminary outcomes of the survey, but we hope for even higher take-up by more Member States throughout the whole process.

The Impact Task Force

In order to enhance the capacity of Member States to launch transnational calls and mainstream the impact of transnational activities, the ESF Transnational Platform has established an Impact Task Force, which started operating in February 2017.

21 Managing Authorities from 16 countries expressed their interest in being part of the Task Force, whose main goal is to help the Member States to prepare and implement transnational calls, by building capacity and facilitating agreement on the conditions for the next co-ordinated call. It will also contribute to gathering evidence of the impact and added value of transnational activities in view of the preparation of the next programming period.

Planned activities are:

- meetings to build capacity and agree common terms of reference and procedures for the 2018 co-ordinated call (first meeting on 13-14 March 2017)
- individual coaching at the request of Managing Authorities
- online forum for discussions and questions by Managing Authorities – see: https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/forums/impact-task-force
- help Member States to set up national/shadow networks
- monitor outcomes of transnational calls (co-ordinated and flexible)

Further information

Aleksandra Kowalska, ako@aeid.eu
A joined-up approach to unemployment

Mike Campbell, the newly appointed joint expert of the Employment Thematic Network, is a labour market consultant working in the UK and internationally. With his extensive experience of skills and labour market issues in both research and policy he brings the network a fresh yet seasoned outlook. Here he explains how closer cooperation between the nine networks would benefit everyone and explores the idea of making one-stop shops a flagship project.

Since all nine thematic networks are working towards the same aim – improving the impact of the ESF through transnationality, in pursuit of the Europe 2020 employment objectives – it seems logical that their efforts be pulled together. All thematic experts agree on this but point to the lack of time and resources as serious obstacles to in-depth cooperation.

For Dr Campbell the answer could be for networks to work together towards producing a single product. “The focus on one-stop shops – integrated service centres – could be a flagship project bringing together the youth, employment, inclusion, migrant, learning and skills and partnership networks. The issues are slightly different from one network to the next but there is a great deal of overlap, so as long as it is well-targeted, cooperation could be very interesting.”

With this in mind Armelle Ledan, the expert for the Learning and Skills network, was invited to the recent meeting in Paris between the Employment network and the Public Employment Services (PES) Network to discuss one-stop shops. Despite the obvious and essential “skills and employment nexus” this was the first time a collaboration between the two networks was discussed. “Links between skills and tackling long-term unemployment have never been addressed in either network, despite the fact that skills are the central determinant of employability,” says Dr Campbell. “Improving the skills of the long-time unemployed should be a service provided by one-stop-shops.”

Learning from the best – that’s the European project

Employer engagement is another issue that would benefit from cooperation between networks, and one that would boost the impact of one-stop shops on employment. “It is crucial to build good relationships with employers in order to have more job vacancies available in one-stop shops.”

A third issue discussed at the Paris meeting was the possibility of profiling those walking into the one-stop shops. “This is about identifying people who have recently lost their jobs, to determine whether they are at risk of long-term unemployment, then targeting them as soon as possible to prevent it actually happening.”

Linked to this topic is the role of counsellors and how guidance officers need to identify people’s needs and provide them with tailored services. “To ensure a better impact, case workers need to create action plans with the individuals they are working with,” says Dr Campbell. “All these issues are important for all networks.”

“Learning from the best – that’s the European project,” Dr Campbell says, pointing out that Finland for example has years of experience in one-stop-shops with its cutting edge Ohjaamo centre, and “it would be mad for other countries to launch a one-stop-shop without looking at what is happening in Finland, and in Ireland with INTREO.” “We have a lot to learn from each other. Transnationality is not trivial. It is about integrating best practices where it matters. It is about making policy and delivery better.”

Further information

Mike Campbell’s website: http://www.professormikecampbell.com/
How do we drive innovation within the European Social Fund to get better results? This is a key question that all of the ESF Transnational Networks are grappling with. It’s one with special relevance for the Youth Employment group, due to our focus on tackling the issue of NEETs (young people not in education, employment or training).

It’s a hot topic for us due to the finding of the Commission’s three-year review of the Youth Guarantee. Although this hailed the successes achieved, it also pinpointed weaknesses to address. One was the need to improve engagement with the most marginalised young people. But how can we do this?

Some clever person once said that “if you always do what you’ve always done, then you’ll always get what you’ve always got.” In our context that means trying new things, taking some risks and exploring ways to design and deliver services differently. Without this, we will struggle to reach the most vulnerable young people in society.

However, the good news is that there are inspiring examples across Europe. One of these is Ohjaamo, Finland’s network of low-threshold guidance centres for young people. Although initially, this might not sound like a great innovation breakthrough, you may be surprised. We were, when we visited the Helsinki Ohjaamo centre recently. Here are three of the findings which raised eyebrows in our group.

1. Young people at the heart of the design process

Nowadays, all successful services continually improve by drawing on their customers’ experience. Public services are no different. At their most effective, they pay careful attention to the client perspective. Ideally, they look for ways to involve them in service improvement, and co-design with young people has been an important principle underpinning the development of the Ohjaamo centres.

The design of the Helsinki Ohjaamo Centre, which opened in late 2015, was shaped by a group of young
people recruited through an open process. Their suggestions for an effective support centre contained some interesting components. One was a recommendation for face-to-face rather than online support at the centre. This may seem surprising, given that Millennials are digital natives. But it underlines what we already know – that trusted personal relationships are key to supporting clients into employment. Another recommendation was for an informal and relaxed atmosphere in the centres. Consequently, we don’t see banks of computers, but a casual comfortable space, with small groups of people in animated discussions. No uniforms. No badges. It’s a bit like a very cool coffee shop!

**2. Service collocation ≠ service integration**

Ohjaamo centres provide a one-stop service to young people. In Helsinki, as well as employment and training questions, they can also get advice on housing, health and recreation issues. These services are provided under one roof by a combined team of public and NGO staff.

Again, that’s not so radical, as everyone seems to be talking about ‘one-stop shops’ these days. What’s particularly interesting in Finland though is the understanding that simply collocating services is not enough. In fact, that’s when the real challenge starts; **service integration is more about people than buildings.**

In practice this means significant time and investment in supporting the culture shift implicit in the development of true hybrid services. Key steps have included an innovative project to prepare and support staff with the change process; a sophisticated matrix management system for staff and a bespoke monitoring and evaluation framework ensuring that everyone is working towards the same goals.

**3. Approach to tracking**

Only one in ten of the young people going through Ohjaamo’s doors is reflected in their project statistics. This was probably the biggest surprise from our study visit.

Young people dropping in for a first visit to the centre are not required to provide their data. In the case of those (1 in 10) who return for more detailed follow-up support, this information is captured and they appear on the system. However, this means that the numbers only reflect a small proportion of the centre’s overall activity.

This seems to fly in the face of all ESF regulations. However, behind it lies a clear logic. This is driven by the centres’ ambition to connect with the hardest to reach young people, who are often unwilling to actively engage with services. By foregoing data capture in this first exchange, the aspiration is that more disaffected young people will come forward – and that a trusted relationship will start. This trade-off seems a good example of **pragmatism driven by clear strategic goals.**

And the fact that client satisfaction rates with the Helsinki centre score 9.4 out of 10 suggests that they are doing something right.

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**Jobcentrum plays for real**

**Jobcentrum in West Flanders, Belgium, has a 60% success rate in getting disabled people into jobs, using an approach based on playing games.**

Access to the labour market is clearly more difficult for people with an occupational disability. Whether they suffer from a physical disability or a psycho-social problem, they often need multi-dimensional support to have a chance to get a job or stay in it. That is why Dienstencentrum, an NGO managing a variety of services for people with disabilities in West Flanders (Belgium), has developed Jobcentrum. This initiative consists in creating opportunities for sustainable work through a wide range of actions involving people with occupational disabilities. It raised a lot of interest amongst the members of the ESF Thematic Network on Employment when it was presented to them last year.

The beneficiaries are selected by VDAB, the Flemish public employment agency. Thanks to a team of 50 coaches, Jobcentrum delivers personal guidance, based on a number of core values that include empowerment and informed choice. The professionals take care of participants for as long as they need, without any time limit, and continuing even after they have taken up a new job. The success rate (the percentage of people given guidance who find a job) is close to 60%.
What is job carving?

Job carving involves creating, modifying or customising a community-based job so that it can be successfully performed by an individual with disabilities, while simultaneously meeting the needs of an employer. Job carving typically involves conducting a task analysis of a job or a process by breaking it down into a series of smaller steps which are then assigned to different people so as to exploit their strengths and skills to the fullest. Elementary tasks are grouped for low-qualified people whereas more demanding tasks remain with the more highly-educated employees.

Serious games

Interactions are partly based on a number of innovative games. Sociopoly builds the soft skills that are needed in a professional environment, such as how to give and receive criticism or how to communicate with a supervisor. Werkr8! helps people to write a ‘business plan’ for themselves, based on the widely used Business Model Canvas. As people often do not know what their talents are, the game helps them to identify their assets (their value proposition to employers) and how they would benefit by going back to work (money, social contacts, confidence). It encourages initiative and detects blind spots and opportunities for action.

Over the years, Dienstencentrum has accumulated a great deal of expertise and experience. It is now investing more and more in contacts with employers, to convince them that they do have jobs for people with disabilities and to avoid drop-outs. It tends to be more difficult to get public financing for this marketing activity, even if it is probably where a lot can be achieved.

This initiative, which is financed by the ESF, now supports 600 people – currently in or looking for a job – every year through its four branches in Gits (near Roeselare), Kortrijk, Bruges and Ostend. VDAB selects the beneficiaries and pays a fee per jobseeker supported. The NGO is also taking inspiration from initiatives in the Netherlands and Finland to develop job carving for low qualified people. On the basis of the preliminary results of the ESF project, Jobcentrum states that job carving helps meet a number of challenges in today’s labour market, such as providing sustainable work systems or filling vacancies for which the market only offers limited resources.

The innovative character of Jobcentrum has drawn praise, for instance from Caroline Meyers of the Flemish ESF Managing Authority, who says: “Thanks to ESF funding, Jobcentrum had the opportunity to develop several useful and creative approaches. Proof of this is that Jobcentrum has been granted the title of ‘ESF Ambassador’, to disseminate their tools further”.

Supporting green growth in Wallonia

The Walloon government sees a job-rich future in environmental technologies, and in 2005 established the Forem Environnement skills centre in Mons to offer the theoretical and technical training the sector needs. Last November, the ESF Thematic Network on Learning and Skills paid it a visit.

Forem Environnement in Mons is one of 25 skills centres in Wallonia, each of which has its own sectoral speciality. Skills Centres are a new generation of training centres, based on partnership and a bottom-up approach. Each centre’s speciality results from a local labour market needs analysis carried out in collaboration with local companies. The Mons centre focuses on environmental, energy and waste management, and trains both job seekers and those in work, as well as students and teachers.

Two key features are that the centre focuses on an economic sector with great growth potential, and that it runs in partnership with local companies. To maximise trainee employability, courses are designed with the needs of real sector-specific companies in mind, but
also cover more general topics to equip trainees with the relevant skills for the labour market. Training modules are constantly developed and adapted according to companies’ needs. This partnership with local companies is vital in guaranteeing a high technical level and access to the most up-to-date equipment.

**The right skills**

To gauge what skills employers need, the skills centre combines a bottom-up approach through companies and a more top-down one through sectors, competitive poles and experts. AMEF, the training and labour market analysis service of FOREM (the Walloon public service for employment and vocational training) organises round tables with the relevant actors to systematically analyse the labour market. Sectors at the origin of the creation of the Mons centre and still fully involved, are AGORIA (technological industries), the Walloon Building Confederation, and ESSENSIA (chemical industry). A wider range of partners, including research centres and universities, take part in this analysis and in monitoring the centre’s activities.

The political priorities of the Walloon region are also taken into account. FOREM coordinates the skills centres, and as such, translates the government priorities into their activities. Today, in the framework of the Marshall Plan 4.0, the policy priorities are: work based learning and dual learning; jobs of the future; innovation; sustainable development and digital transition. The skills centres then design training courses to fit these criteria. At Mons, course design is based on the following factors:

- cross-cutting theme: energy and environmental management
- specialised modules for existing qualifications
- downstream of traditional channels
- ready-to-wear as well as custom-made (companies, schools)
- focus on skills assessment (in collaboration with VET professionals)

**Practice-oriented training**

The courses are practice-oriented, though they also cover theory. They include:

- theoretical training in renewable energy for architects, energy advisers, waste and environment managers, university students etc.
- technical training in renewable energy, heating and cooling, and cogeneration, including on-site training on companies’ equipment and trainee-ships in companies
- on-site training for companies
- training of trainers

To ensure this link to practice, trainers are largely recruited from among professionals and from companies, and then trained in pedagogy. They receive continuous training from companies which have developed new equipment and need to teach people how to use it. Trainees receive €1.00 for each training hour, as well as help with transport and childcare costs in addition to unemployment benefits. All courses are evaluated by the trainees at the end of the course and the feedback is used to improve existing courses.

Successful trainees gain the qualification of CECAF – Energy Adviser. The CECAF (Certificate of Competences Acquired during Training) is a method based on the European Qualifications Framework for certifying the competences a trainee acquired during the course. Beyond the courses taught, the skills centre also certifies skills acquired informally.

FOREM funds the centre through the ESF, ERDF and Interreg, and the Walloon employment and education authorities. Both have an agreement on the validation system for credits and qualifications that can be obtained from the centre.

Women’s needs are not ignored. Though the environmental management sector is male-dominated, it has recently been attracting more women. In the long term, the biggest challenge is to overcome stereotypes about the role of women and men in these sectors. The centre maintains international links: it exchanges information and good practices with similar organisations in France, Portugal and Italy, which may lead to the creation of an EU model. It also has environmental study projects in Algeria and Morocco.

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1. [http://planmarshall.wallonie.be](http://planmarshall.wallonie.be)

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Impala: how data science can transform career guidance

A new web service displays education and career paths in an easy-to-understand way that brings out unsuspected opportunities and links. Antoine Saint-Denis reports.

Many young people have no clear view of the career they want to train for. A new tool called Impala asks them questions about their motivation and areas of interest (for instance, ‘science’, ‘travel’, ‘adventure’ and ‘aviation’) and builds a map of possible occupations and training pathways. On this map, the points represent occupations, while schools are just a click away. Users can filter the information by wage or course length. This visual presentation is a liberation from the usual cumbersome paper documentation on education and career options. It also has the advantage of showing equivalences, in terms of skills or wages, between jobs one would not have spontaneously mentioned in the same breath.

Such a web service does not replace face-to-face counselling. But it does deliver first-level information in a user-friendly way, and enables users to imagine themselves in different education and work contexts, helping them to overcome the preconceptions. Counsellors, teachers and parents also appreciate the service as a basis for discussion. More than 25,000 people have used it since its launch a year ago.

Not just a search engine

Impala’s data is rigorously compiled. Its databases have been filled with official data on skills and jobs. Impala uses data science to deliver an enhanced level of service compared to web search engines, whose results inevitably mix uneven sources. The issue to tackle is that there is a lot of information available, which is technically good most of the time, but largely irrelevant to the target audience. The innovation thus consists in combining intuitive access with qualitatively validated information.

Antoine Guo and Hector Balas, Impala’s two young founders, are engaged in co-constructing Impala with users – high school students seeking academic orientation and unemployed people looking for a job. They work in partnership with Pôle Emploi, France’s public employment agency, and the French Education Ministry. They are also exploring how to expand their service to other EU countries.

The service is free to use. Nor do schools mentioned online pay for it, so there is no hidden advertising and the information stays neutral. The business model relies on financial support from education agencies and the reuse of its methodology by big companies that want to support their staff’s career progression.

Impala generated great interest when it was presented to the Thematic Network on Employment at its meeting in Paris on 13-14 December 2016. The meeting was hosted by the Cité des Métiers, an outstanding lifelong learning platform where several dozen partners have pooled their resources to deliver high-level personalised information and advice to people who want to find a job, look for training or change their career.

Further information

Website: http://impala.in
Hector Balas, co-founder: hector@impala.in

1 http://www.cite-sciences.fr/fr/au-programme/lieux-ressources/cite-des-metiers/
Using the database to input your project and build a partnership

You search for partners... You have a project idea... You want to build a partnership...

The ESF Transnational Platform (ESF TP) [https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality](https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/) can help you. The key steps:

1. Log on to the ESF TP
   - Go to the platform
   - Connect with your ECAS account or create one (top left corner)
   - Complete your profile (if it is the first time you log in)

2. Use the Partner search [https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/partners-search](https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/partners-search)
   - To look for project ideas
   - To check if your organisation is mentioned or active
   - To search for partners

On the ESF TP homepage, you have direct search filters at the bottom of the page (projects, organisations, calls, TCAs...).

As you make a search, results are presented with supplementary filters on the left to help you refine your search.

While you are connected to the platform, you can send messages to the contact persons of projects, managing authorities etc.

3. You want to propose a project idea:
   - Go to your space “myTNC” – TNC = TransNational Cooperation
   - Go to the tab “Create content”
     - Click on “Organisation” to create your organisation if it doesn’t exist yet in the database
     - Add contact persons as needed (you can invite contributors if they are not yet on the ESF TP).
     - Then, click on “Project” to create a project idea. It gets a unique identification number, the TPI – Transnational Project Identifier.
     - How to input content and save or publish your project: see user guide above.
   - To manage/revise Organisations or Projects you created or on which you have contribution rights, go to your space “myTNC” and search under the first tab “My Content”.

*TCA = Transnational Cooperation Agreement*
4. You have found partners, you want to build a partnership (TCA) and submit it to your Managing Authorities:

a. Go to your space “myTNC”, tab “Create content”
   - Click on “TCA” – fill in as much as you can and save as draft.
   - Add your partnering projects into the TCA using their TPI number or project title. You can find this information via the partner search tool or ask your partners directly.
   - You can ask / inform your partner to collaboratively input data into the TCA or do it for them.

b. To manage/revise TCAs you created or on which you have contribution rights, go to your space “myTNC”, tab “My Content”.

c. To submit your TCA to the corresponding Managing Authorities for evaluation, the projects attached to the TCA must be complete and published (not only saved, but also published via the project screen itself). An error/alert message will remind you to go to the corresponding projects before you can send the TCA to the MAs.

d. After submission of your TCA, the corresponding MAs are notified by email.
   - Once all involved MAs have given their green light your TCA receives the global green light.
   - Any of the following modifications revert the status of the TCA to orange, the MAs are notified, and the MAs concerned by the modification need to re-approve the TCA:
     - Any change in the content of the TCA.
     - Core change in a partnering project: country of submission, call for proposal, project leading organisation.
     - Core change in a leading organisation: name of the organisation in the national language, or its country.

So, make sure this information is correct before submitting your TCA.

Further information

A short user guide on TCA: https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/content/short-tca-user-guide-online-tool

A support forum on technical aspects of the ESF TP is available with several user guides. You can also create discussion topics (suggestions, technical help etc.): https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/forums/technical-support
EVENTS

Future, inspiration, practice

Book the date: our 2017 conference will be on 1 and 2 June.

This year’s annual ESF Transnational Platform event will take place on 1 and 2 June in Brussels. For our community, this event is the key moment to wrap up what we have learned throughout this second year of activity, to work across the themes of our nine networks, and to explore new ways to strengthen transnational cooperation and to enhance the impact of the ESF.

The conference will bring together 250 participants – from ESF Managing Authorities and Intermediate Bodies, public authorities in charge of policy, social partners and NGOs working nationally or at European level, European Commission officers and the AEIDL team in charge of the Platform.

We will put together an enriching event, in which everyone has a chance to share their experience, to comment on ESF and policy developments and to learn from each other. You will be have a choice of a dozen workshops where you can work interactively, and three inspirational sessions about the future – of inclusion in a time of social investment, of training and work, and of policy-making. Of course, topical issues related to the ESF and to transnational cooperation will be at the core of our discussions. In particular, we aim to make a push on transnational calls for proposals and on improving support to social innovation.

The Platform’s first seminar, held in June last year, investigated the many crossovers between different Thematic Networks. We hope you will enjoy the new edition at least as much as you did last year!

We are looking forward to meeting you in Brussels on 1-2 June. You should receive an invitation shortly. Travel and accommodation will be organised directly by the European Commission’s contractors. Please do not book anything by yourself since we will not be able to reimburse you. If you think you are not already in our contact list but would like to attend, please contact us at esf@aeidl.eu.

Contact

Webpage of the conference: https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/content/2017conference