



EU Competency Framework for the management and implementation of the European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund

Annex 7: Good practices of competency based
approaches in ESIF management and implementation
systems



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Table of contents

1.	Map of competencies and centralized trainings – Lithuania	1
2.	Competency framework of the one-stop-shop for ERDF and CF beneficiaries- Latvia	3
3.	Competence analysis on regional level – Sweden.....	5
4.	Competence Centres and development of competencies of employees – Lithuania	7
5.	Action Plan for Administrative Capacity Development – Poland	9
6.	Administrative Reinforcement Plans – Italy	11
7.	ESIF Working Groups and Sub-Working Groups - Germany.....	14
8.	Evidence based learning and networking meetings for regional growth – Sweden	16
9.	Knowledge management, sharing and training - Rhône-Alpes region, France	18
10.	Fraud prevention activities and transparency - Sweden	20
11.	Forum for MA and IB Coordination - Spain	22
12.	EU-28 Co-financing bonuses and top-ups through TA	24

1. Map of competencies and centralized trainings – Lithuania

Context and description of the good practice

This good practice describes the competency framework for ESIF institutions developed by the Lithuanian Managing Authority, i.e. the “Map of Competencies” (hereinafter “Map”) and its application in the institutional learning and development process.

The first version of the Map was developed in 2011 to ensure systematic capacity building and ultimately improve management of EU Structural Funds. It was based on an analysis of the required and available competencies of 1,250 civil servants and employees working in 18 different institutions responsible for the management of the ERDF, CF and ESF. The Map has since then been periodically updated to take into account changing needs and requirements, with the last update performed in 2014.

How competencies are addressed

In terms of structure the map includes six clusters of competencies that cover operational, management and professional aspects, applicable to 3 types of authorities and 3 groups of employees identified on the basis of their experience and job role:

Competencies	Authorities	Groups of employees
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of EU legislation related to the management of ERDF, CF, ESF; • Knowledge of national legislation related to the management of ERDF, CF, ESF; • Knowledge of the requirements for funding and management of operational programmes and projects and ability to apply this knowledge; • General skills related to the management of ERDF, CF, ESF; • Knowledge of processes and principles of operations applied internally in the institution; • Management skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing Authority, • Certifying Authority; • Intermediate Bodies (Ministries and other authorities at the national level); • Intermediate Bodies (Agencies working directly with beneficiaries). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Beginners”: new civil servants and employees who have worked for less than 6 months and employees who returned after long term leave (more than 2 years); • “Advanced”: civil servants and employees who have worked for more than 6 months; • “Managers”: heads of authorities, departments, divisions, units and their deputies.

The implementation of the Map is not compulsory and the extent of its implementation varies across the different institutions.

The Managing Authority uses it for centralised planning and organisation of trainings, as well as for the HR management processes while its application among Intermediate Bodies is generally correlated to the legal status of the institutions. Implementing Agencies acting as Intermediate Bodies apply the Map to HR management processes such as recruitment, annual performance assessments, preparation of job descriptions and employee development plans.

The Map is applied to a relatively limited extent within the Ministries acting as Intermediate Bodies, where employees responsible for the management of ERDF, ESF, and CF are civil servants, and as such are subject to civil servants legislation requirements in terms of HR management processes and tools.

Other authorities e.g. the Audit Authority and some Intermediate Bodies use the Map as an input for the development of their own competency frameworks.

Benefits on HR and administrative capacity

While the use of the Map is not mandatory for ESIF institutions, its application supports the learning and development process of the whole system. Since 2012, the Managing Authority has used the Map as a basis for the central planning and organization of trainings for all ESIF institutions, which ensures consistency in the development of competencies as all employees receive the same basic trainings. The target group consists of representatives of Intermediate Bodies, Audit Authority, Certifying Authority and Managing Authority, at both managerial and specialist level.

The initial training plan has been developed considering the identified different institutional needs and competency gaps. The plan focuses on the development of operational competences directly related to the participants' tasks, as well as on professional (e.g. communication, negotiations) and management competencies (e.g. leadership, delegation, coaching).

The training plans are periodically updated by the Managing Authority taking into account the participants' feedback, institutions' needs, changes in the legislative environment, conclusions and remarks of Audit Authority.

It is generally agreed that the training is mostly beneficial for new hires and employees lacking knowledge of ESIF management and control systems, as well as an understanding of European and national legislative environments.

Training (especially in the case of broader and more general topics) are usually planned and conducted centrally and at the same time for groups of representatives from all interested authorities with similar needs. This allows economies of scale and creates opportunity for discussions and the sharing of points of view on the same topic from different institutions. However, in the case of specific needs, the training sessions are delivered for a particular institution or for a small group of representatives from few institutions.

The centrally organised training is funded through technical assistance and is delivered by independent service providers as well as experienced practitioners from the authorities who are invited to share knowledge.

Conclusions and lessons learned

Overall the Map of Competencies has a widespread use among authorities of the ESIF system and is considered by stakeholders as an effective tool for the improvement of individual and institutional competencies. The Map ensures a unified and consistent approach towards competency based management and the integrated organization of trainings leading to a common, coherent learning path and facilitating the exchange of experience between the different institutions.

2. Competency framework of the one-stop-shop for ERDF and CF beneficiaries- Latvia

Context and description of the good practice

The ESIF institutional framework in Latvia for the 2014-2020 programming period is characterized by the existence of a single Managing Authority (Ministry of Finance), ten 1st level Intermediate Bodies (line ministries) and a single 2nd level Intermediate Body, the Central Finance and Contracting Agency (CFCA).

1st level Intermediate Bodies ensure that the programme is implemented according to sector policies and in line with the established priorities, and are involved in the planning of implementation, development of selection criteria and overall monitoring of implementation.

The 2nd level Intermediate Body is responsible for the administration of projects, its responsibilities covering the launching of calls for proposals, project selection, contract sign-off, control and verification of expenditure, reimbursement of expenditure to beneficiaries, preparation of declarations of expenditure to the EC and consultations with applicants and beneficiaries.

The current framework represents a substantial change compared to the 2007-2013 period with a reduction in the number of 2nd level Intermediate Bodies from 8 in the 2007-2013 programming period to a single agency in 2014-2020, acting as a one-stop shop for ERDF and CF beneficiaries and applicants.

This good practice explains how competencies are addressed within the CFCA in terms of identification and development, and the benefits that have been achieved with the reduction of the number of Intermediate Bodies and establishment of a one-stop shop.

How competencies are addressed

The CFCA falls under the Ministry of Finance and has established three regional branches in order to improve physical access to its services for stakeholders on the territory. Its main functions are:

- To have a dialogue with applicants and beneficiaries on project development and implementation
- To select projects for ESIF support
- To conclude agreements with beneficiaries on project implementation
- To perform the monitoring and control of projects
- To review and approve the payment claims of project beneficiaries

In order to ensure the availability of the required competencies to fulfil the newly assigned tasks, the human resources department and top and middle level management of the CFCA have developed during 2014-2015 a competency framework. The CFCA was one of the first institutions in Latvia's public sector to develop and introduce such a tool.

The competency framework of the CFCA covers both technical and soft competencies. There are defined technical competences needed to perform responsibilities of all CFCA positions, e.g. financial analysis, procurement organization, industry specific knowledge, in such areas as information technology, education and road construction. Other components of the competency framework are soft competencies that are defined in the competence catalogue of the Latvian governmental institutions.

Technical competencies are considered particularly relevant as the CFCA manages the CF, ERDF and ESF, thus requiring the coverage of a broad range of thematic areas/industries and types of beneficiaries.

The competency framework is embedded in the HR management process. In particular, the CFCA has used the competency framework in the recruitment of employees from 7 intermediate bodies to assess their competencies. The competency framework is further embedded in the employees' appraisal process and in the design of trainings.

Competency evaluations are managed by CFCA staff, and rely on occasional outside technical support when needed. Trainings are based on the outcomes of the individuals' competencies assessment, and are performed through traditional classroom training, train-the-trainer programmes and e-learning modules.

Trainings on technical competencies are provided by CFCA employees who are trained in train-the-trainer sessions whereas soft competences are developed by employees themselves via a lifelong learning approach. In order to assess the results of training, tests are conducted after each training session.

Benefits on HR and administrative capacity

The development of the competence framework of the CFCA was the most relevant change management instrument implemented in the transition from 8 intermediate bodies to a one-stop-shop model.

Its benefits have been tangible in terms of the development of human resources for the CFCA, as well as efficiency in the use of public financial resources and quality of services provided by the institution.

The implementation process benefits in terms of improved coordination in the preparation and launch of calls for proposals, a unified approach towards applicants and beneficiaries with regard to requirements, as well as provision of a single contact point for clients.

Conclusions and lessons learned

The development and implementation of a competency framework has proved to be a success factor in the redesign and rationalization of Latvia's ESIF implementation system, enabling the development of human resources and the achievement of higher levels of administrative capacity.

3. Competence analysis on regional level – Sweden

Context and description of the good practice

The Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (Tillväxtverket) is the Managing Authority of eight regional programmes, one national programme and the cross-border INTERREG programme Öresund-Kattegat-Skagerrak.

The eight regional programmes are administered by the regional offices of the Managing Authority; the national programme is administered in the Stockholm Head Office, which is integrated in the unit handling enterprise policy at the national level.

The above set-up is the result of a restructuring process of the Agency, aimed at increasing the effectiveness and strategic approach of the distribution of funds, resulting in the reorganisation of the eight regional offices.

In this restructuring process, each regional office was asked to perform a competency analysis in order to find gaps in competencies in the management of ERDF funds as well as in other areas.

How competencies are addressed

In each regional office, workshops were organized in order to identify and rate the most crucial areas where a competency or experience gap was shown, in order to address it as soon as possible.

The first step of this structured approach consisted in the identification of the goals and missions of the regional offices and their related tasks. The second step consisted in the identification of the competency gaps related to the specific competencies required for the organisation, while the last step was to prioritize the respective areas.

Based on the identified competency gaps, a competency development plan at the regional office as well as at the national level was developed with indicators for each area. The competency development plan was the basis for the development of an education programme, and has been incorporated in the areas of competency development and training for the overall HR of the national business plan.

Benefits on HR and administrative capacity

The above process has been managed centrally by the human resources services of Tillväxtverket that collected and analysed data in order to use it in future recruitment, training and development activities. The data is now used both at national and regional level in order to identify areas where there is a need for the development of specific competences (e.g. legal and public procurement aspects).

The project has had a very positive impact within the regional offices and has contributed towards a greater focus on competency development in the organisation. In addition the project has given employees an increased awareness of the need for a more strategic approach in their competency development. This has been empowering, and has resulted in the development of a broader set of competencies relevant for the implementation of different funds.

Benefits have also been achieved at Agency level as the organisation now has a broader, more strategic orientation and improved effectiveness due to the better use of competencies. Moreover, the focus and mission of the Agency have changed from only following the guidelines and distributing funds, to understanding why this is done and making sure that any decisions are aligned with the overall goal and long term strategy.

In other words there is a greater focus on the achievement of strategic results which ensures that funds are used in an efficient and effective manner.

Conclusions and lessons learned

Because of this project and the focus on change in both mind-set and structure, Tillväxtverket is better equipped for the implementation of the programming period 2014-2020. There is still work to be done in terms of education and structural change, but the Agency feels that it has made great progress and is looking forward to future work and further developments.

The main lesson learned is that strategic organizational change can be achieved in the presence of a common understanding of an institutions' mission and adequate management support.

The process should be considered an investment towards the creation of a new organizational identity, one that is focused on the achievement of strategic objectives rather than on funds distribution, and where the availability of competencies is critical for success.

4. Competence Centres and development of competencies of employees – Lithuania

Context and description of the good practice

In the 2007-2013 programming period the institutions responsible for managing ESIF were facing various challenges in areas such as state aid, public procurement, investment planning and in the appraisal of investment projects. In order to find a systematic solution for the 2014-2020 programming period, two approaches were developed: 1) the set-up of Methodological Competence Centres and 2) the internal development of competencies within existing institutions.

How competencies are addressed

Methodological Competence Centres are established within Lithuanian public institutions (e.g. the Information Society Development Committee under the Ministry of Transport and the Communications, Central Project Management Agency, the Energy Agency) with comparatively higher competencies in the respective areas and which have been formally incorporated into the ESIF management and control system. Their main function is to provide methodological assistance and advice to authorities responsible for managing EU funds and beneficiaries on specific aspects, such as investment planning, cost benefit analysis and state aid.

Additionally some of the authorities managing the funds decided to build the required capacity internally and therefore developed teams of internal experts with expertise in specific areas such as IT, infrastructure and public procurement. These experts assist other employees in performing functions on a daily basis and are also responsible for sharing knowledge and collecting best practise examples within their authorities.

In order to ensure the widest spread of competencies among staff, these authorities have also developed internal training and mentoring programmes that provide a formal framework for the sharing of knowledge between the most experienced employees (practitioners) and newcomers.

Internal trainings usually cover different topics in which authorities want to enhance their internal administrative capacity, e.g. state aid, public procurement. Mentoring programmes during the new employees' probationary period have also been introduced. Mentors are appointed for each new employee and are responsible for supporting integration, providing guidance and giving an opinion on the employee's competencies after the probationary period.

The authorities also run internship programmes. Interns are recruited with the possibility to combine studies and work, with mutual benefits for both authorities and interns. The authorities test the participants and get the chance to permanently hire the best performers whereas interns gain practical knowledge and experience.

Benefits on HR and administrative capacity

It is expected that the establishment and operation of the Methodological Competence Centres will ensure that specific challenges and issues faced by authorities managing ERDF, CF and final beneficiaries are addressed through a single point of contact. The assignment of such responsibilities should further promote deep specialisation and building specific competencies within the public administration institutions, reducing the need to engage external experts.

Internal capacity building activities are beneficial for a particular authority both in the short and long term: internal experts are capable of promptly responding to challenges that their colleagues face and training, mentoring, and internship programmes support capacity building and sustainable management of human resources.

Conclusions and lessons learned

Ultimately, implementation of the Methodological Competence Centres and the internal capacity building initiatives should improve the efficiency of managing and implementing EU funds on the national level, and increase the quality of services provided to final beneficiaries. While it is difficult to measure the impact of the inclusion of Methodological Competence Centres, as they are relatively new, the internal capacity building activities have already proven to be effective, and will continue to be effective.

5. Action Plan for Administrative Capacity Development – Poland

Context and description of the good practice

In the period 2004-2006 and in the first years of the programming period 2007-2014, Polish institutions involved in the management of Structural Funds operational programmes were facing the challenge of high annual staff turnover rates which were in the range of 20%, but also reaching peaks of 40% and 60%.

The turnover was caused by the relatively scarce availability on the market of qualified resources in the area of Structural Funds management and implementation, resulting in experts moving from management structures to beneficiaries and the private sector, where more competitive salaries were offered.

How competencies are addressed

In order to ensure the availability and retention of qualified staff, the managing and coordinating institutions have adopted a coordinated set of measures. These measures include the review of salaries, the use of top-ups and bonuses (see best practice on bonuses and top-ups), the provision of trainings and the constant monitoring of the capacity of institutions of the Structural Funds system.

The average gross salaries were increased towards the market levels paid to professionals in possession of higher education diplomas due to the comparable level of qualification required to manage Structural Funds. Salaries as well as trainings were financed through technical assistance measures.

In addition, the institutional capacity has been subject to permanent monitoring by the ministry responsible for regional development through regular reports, (drafted every six months) providing a diagnosis of institutional capacity of all institutions.

Learning from this successful experience, the Ministry of Economic Development, Coordinating Body for ESIF 2014-2020, has adopted as of 2014 an “An action plan to ensure the administrative capacity of institutions involved in the implementation of Cohesion Policy 2014-2020” which is hereby presented as good practice.

The Action Plan defines the estimated demand for personnel in the institutions involved in the implementation of Cohesion Policy in 2014–2020, the recommended model of employment structure based on the processes implemented, recommendations on possible personnel shifts necessary in view of the dynamics of Cohesion Policy implementation and identifies the technical assistance resources to be used for financing salaries.

More specifically the first step consisted in the identification of the main tasks of the institutions, distinguishing between programme management tasks directly related to projects (i.e. launching of calls for proposals, assistance to projects, controls and verification of expenditure) and those related to programme management (i.e. certification of expenditure, reporting, evaluation, information and publicity, support).

Based on the 2007-2013 experience, the methodology assumed that the number of staff involved in programme management tasks should not exceed the size of the work-force involved in tasks directly related to projects.

The employment levels for the institutions involved in the management of 2014-2020 were estimated through a two-step methodology. The first step consisted of a quantitative analysis of the workload per staff in 2007-2013, and measured the amount of financial expenditure handled by employees. This ratio was then applied to the 2004-2014 financial allocations in order to estimate the number of staff required for handling project implementation tasks and consequently programme implementation tasks. Secondly, the estimates were subject to a qualitative analysis on behalf of a panel of experts.

Benefits on HR and administrative capacity

The analyses estimated that employment in all the institutions involved in the implementation of the Cohesion Policy should amount to a total of 10.796 jobs, including both institutions involved in programme implementation and institutions of horizontal nature (i.e. Coordinating Body, Audit Authority and other institutions).

Based on the analyses, for institutions involved in the implementation of operational programmes employment should reach 9.622 jobs, with a 3.6% decrease in the institutions involved in the implementation of national programmes and an increase of 12.2% for regional operational programmes.

The plan also provides considerations on the training needs of employees. Starting from the fact that significant experience has already been gained in project implementation, it was concluded that trainings should focus on the novelties of the programming period, the achievement of higher levels of specialization in the area of Funds management (rather than basic trainings) and competency development in the thematic areas covered by the funds.

Conclusions and lessons learned

Human resources are one of the key pillars of administrative capacity. The Polish experience shows that an attentive human resources policy can bring substantial benefits in terms of staff retention, which positively impacts the process of funds management and implementation.

Also the 2007-2013 experience and the knowledge of experts working in the system can provide relevant baseline data and inputs for estimating the human resources necessary in each of the institutions involved in programme implementation and securing the availability of the necessary financial resources through the technical assistance budgets.

6. Administrative Reinforcement Plans – Italy

Context and description of the good practice

The Partnership Agreement 2014-2020 of Italy highlights the further strengthening of the administrative capacity of stakeholders involved in the management and implementation of ESIF as one of the key challenges for the successful implementation of the Cohesion Policy package.

In response to this challenge and in coordination with the European Commission, each public administration involved in the implementation of an ESIF programme has been required to submit a Plan for Administrative Reinforcement (PRA) together with the respective Operational Programme¹.

PRAs are drafted according to a common template and guidance note, provided by the Italian Coordinating Body, consistent with indications provided by the European Commission and on the basis of an assessment of the existing situation in the respective public administration.

PRAs are guidance documents identifying a set of actions aimed at the strengthening of administrative capacity along with quantifiable targets and implementation deadlines. The actions identified in the PRAs are implemented through technical assistance resources and their implementation is subject to regular monitoring and evaluation.

In principle each PRA identifies the responsibility for PRA implementation and a set of actions aimed at the improvement of standards and quality of programme implementation, capacity building measures (simplification, human resources and horizontal functions), the role of technical assistance, transparency and publicity guidelines, tools for internal verification, control and update of the PRA.

How competencies are addressed

As for human resources, PRAs address both the staff involved in the execution of management functions of the programmes (Managing Authorities, Audit Authorities, and Certifying Authorities) and those employed in implementing structures (e.g. Directorates of the public administration responsible for coordinating the implementation of a Priority Axis or Measure).

Human resources capacity is addressed both in technical terms, i.e. number of staff and appropriateness of the competencies, as well as in terms of organizational capacity, i.e. their position in the organizational structure of the public administration, the independency in performing tasks provided in the ESIF Regulations and the existence of human resources processes and procedures.

For the mere purpose of exemplification we present a set of the human resources related measures included in the PRA of an Italian region, which are structured into challenges, proposed measures, timing and resources involved in the implementation of the measures.

¹ Communication ARES(2014)969811 of 20/03/2014

Challenges/needs identified	Improvement measures	Responsible
Human resources capacity		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced number of staff compared to the existing workload related to the processing of financing applications Renewal of employment contracts for specialist profiles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preparation of employment plan 2014-2016 Identification of human resources requirements Approval of flexible work contracts Updates of workload analysis Introduction of procedures for recruitment competition <p>Deadline: May 2015</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Human Resources Department
Implementation approaches		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existence of different approaches to implementation and different interpretation Lack of capacity in relation to public procurement of Intermediate Bodies and beneficiaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishment of a Knowledge Management approach Operationalization of temporary horizontal taskforces aimed at identifying common approaches Operationalization of internal competency networks through the identification of existing expertise within the public administration Operationalization of permanent task forces in charge of periodic review of procedures Development of knowledge repositories, FAQs, wiki-PA) <p>Deadline: December 2015</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PRA implementation Committee

Benefits on HR and administrative capacity

While it is too early to assess the impact of PRAs on human resources and more broadly of administrative capacity in implementing ESIF, their existence represents a step forward in addressing some of the structural challenges faced in the Italian public administrations.

The approach to PRAs developed through the coordinated action of the Member State and the European Commission, ensures consistency across central and regional public administrations in Italy and the planning of technical assistance resources aimed at solving specific challenges faced by the public administration in a timely manner.

Conclusions and lessons learned

The development of PRAs at programme level represents a means for a structured and detailed planning of technical assistance resources based on the outcomes that the public administration wants to achieve.

7. ESIF Working Groups and Sub-Working Groups - Germany

Context and description of the good practice

This good practice describes the working groups (Bund-Länder-Arbeitsgruppen, Länder-Arbeitsgruppen) and sub-working groups that helped to develop several ERDF-specific competencies by contributing to the mutual learning of Managing Authorities, Certifying Authorities, Audit Authorities, Intermediate Bodies as well as the Coordinating Body and by facilitating networking.

In Germany, ERDF management is decentralized to 16 Länder (states) and the federal level has only coordination tasks, and is not managing any funds directly. In order to become more coherent in their approach and use the full set of competencies available, the Managing Authorities, Certifying Authorities, Audit Authorities and some Intermediate Bodies have set up working groups.

Some of the working groups have been in place for more than ten years (e.g. in Managing Authorities, Audit Authorities), while others have been introduced more recently (e.g. Certifying Authorities). Some of the working groups are coordinated and chaired by the Coordinating Body or other national institutions (Bund-Länder-Arbeitsgruppen), while others are organised without national coordination (Länder-Arbeitsgruppen).

Over the years, the number of working groups and particularly the number of sub-working groups as well as the number of competencies included in those working groups has increased. This is due both to positive experiences with this type of coordination in a decentralized implementation system as well as the perceived increasing complexity in ERDF implementation.

How competencies are addressed

The working groups meet between two and four times a year and mainly cover ERDF-specific or, more generally, ESIF-specific competencies. Sub-working groups are mainly organised along key functions and responsibilities of the respective group of authorities. Decisions on whether topics are discussed in the main working group or in sub-working groups is mainly based on size and complexity, as well as upon the novelty of the function or responsibility compared to typical national and regional administrative functions and responsibilities.

Examples of topics covered by sub-working groups are:

- Monitoring and Evaluation
- Information and Communication
- Management and Control Systems
- Designation
- Horizontal Principles (e.g. Gender Mainstreaming, Environmental Sustainability)

In the working groups and sub-working groups, common interpretations of European Commission guidance notes are determined, questions to the European Commission are drawn up and common checklists are prepared. In addition, participants with high competencies in the respective topic or renowned external experts give presentations on relevant aspects.

Some of the sub-working groups have been in place for one or several funding periods (i.e. standing sub-working groups), while others will only be relevant for shorter periods (i.e. ad-hoc working groups). In most working groups and sub-working groups, there are significant differences between participants in terms of level of expertise in most of the relevant competencies.

Through regular meetings, it usually becomes clear to all participants, who among them have the highest operational competencies. Those will usually be contacted between meetings when one of the authorities needs advice in dealing with challenges in the field concerned.

Benefits on HR and administrative capacity

In Managing, Audit and Certifying Authorities in the 16 Länder, there is usually a relatively low number of employees and significant staff turnover. Furthermore, it is hard to hire employees with relevant knowledge of EU funding which is a challenge inherent in the German public administration. This is why the authorities in the Länder significantly benefit from the working groups and sub-working groups.

The working groups are one of the most important learning options for new employees and create direct peer-to-peer connections to persons in other Länder with high expertise on the function / responsibility concerned.

The ESIF system as a whole benefits from the working groups as well. The working groups and sub-working groups contribute to a more consistent and coherent implementation across the 16 Länder and a better coordination with the federal level. Furthermore it improves effectiveness, quality and efficiency of ERDF funding and contributes to a low error rate in ERDF implementation in Germany.

So far, the national level benefits mainly from being included in the flow of information between the Länder on several relevant issues in the area of ERDF-funding. The possibility of spill overs is currently limited by the fact that there is no ERDF-programme at national level.

Conclusions and how to transpose the Good practice

The working groups and sub-working groups have a central role in knowledge transfer and ERDF-specific competency development in Germany. As ERDF-specific competencies are currently very unevenly distributed between authorities in different Länder, the working groups are unanimously described as an indispensable source of learning between peers and a valuable networking opportunity that contributes to a coordinated and coherent approach to ERDF funding in a decentralized implementation system.

On the downside, there are limits to the usefulness of the working groups, due to the fact that there are significant differences between the Länder in terms of delivery system and amounts of funding available (e.g. between city states such as Berlin and territorial states such as Bavaria).

8. Evidence based learning and networking meetings for regional growth – Sweden

Context and description of the good practice

The Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (Tillväxtverket) has a government mandate to manage and distribute funding from the ERDF and is the Managing Authority of Sweden's ERDF operational programmes. Since 2014 the European Structural Funds responsibilities have, from an organizational perspective, been integrated into the overall assignment of Tillväxtverket's mission of ensuring learning and knowledge dissemination for regional growth.

In the context of implementation of ESIF 2014-20 Tillväxtverket has the responsibility for establishing an evaluation based approach and learning systems that ensure the capitalization of experience from projects and programme implementation. This includes:

- Ensuring that regional and national development actors have sufficient knowledge of ongoing and completed project results to develop and improve implementation
- Ensuring that the Monitoring Committees have sufficient knowledge of past and ongoing efforts to prioritize the projects that are to be supported
- Ensuring opportunities for ongoing projects to learn from their own and others' implementation

In pursuing this objective, Tillväxtverket will capitalize on its successful experience in maintaining and expanding networks for regional growth that bring together public and private organizations. These networks are, regardless of whether the topic is related to national policy or cohesion policy, initiatives called ERFA meetings. ERFA stems from the Swedish word 'erfarenhet', which means experience.

The form of ERFA meetings varies; as an example the INTERREG-ERFA Network organized by Tillväxtverket meets approximately 2-3 times per year. Participants include representatives from all ETC-programmes in which Sweden participates. Tillväxtverket hosts the network meetings, prepares the agenda for the day and bears the cost for meals and conference premises, while participants pay for their travel costs. The Managing Authority and the programme coordinators are given the opportunity to discuss common issues.

How competencies are addressed

The topics debated in ERFA meetings are selected based on their perceived difficulty thus requiring the need for further competency development. For instance in the past years ERFA meetings covered the topics of simplifications, application forms, indicators, overhead costs, evaluation and dissemination of results, education and capacity building as well as communication. During these meetings, project managers of projects that have been finalized or are being implemented, have the opportunity to present their experience.

Benefits on HR and administrative capacity

The sharing of experience has contributed to the learning and knowledge development of participants, and has supported the development of inter-regional, cross-regional and cross-national projects.

Coordination with national strategies is also ensured. For example by developing projects related to clusters and innovation in several sectors or in a larger geographical area there are prospects of system-level development. This outcome is coherent with the “National Strategy for Regional Competitiveness, Entrepreneurship and Employment” in Sweden, according to which it is important to foster cooperation between public research institutes and the private sector.

The ERFA meetings are also a part of the regional dialogue that Tillväxtverket organises in order to ensure long-term close cooperation with the regions. Three regional managers are coordinating the dialogue with regions, to strengthen the strategic cooperation between the actors responsible for development in the regions. The ambition is that dialogues culminate in joint commitments which Tillväxtverket can support both through knowledge sharing and project funding.

Conclusions and lessons learned

In Sweden, during the last decades regional development has been characterized by processes of knowledge and experience sharing in the form of organized network meetings. A central tool for Tillväxtverket is to initiate and coordinate networks, both in the broader context of regional growth implementation and in the context of ESIF, with the aim to create efficient cooperation from which current and future projects, programme implementation actors and policy makers can learn.

ERFA meetings have been very successful and have attracted many participants with a stake in programme implementation, who have shown great commitment and shared experiences that are of benefit for regional growth. Meetings bring value for future work and ensure better understanding of development needs through inspiration, the sharing of knowledge and the possibility to expand networks.

In practice, Tillväxtverket enables authorities and organizations that are involved locally and regionally to meet. This also includes networks that are transnational within the EU and around the Baltic Sea. As a consequence, a focused and decisive cooperation leads to a more efficient and coordinated use of available resources.

National and regional authorities play a significant role in successful regional development work. This requires collaboration between authorities and other players at a national, regional and local level. The prioritization within national strategies should provide guidance for the regional development work.

This means that structured and continuous exchange of knowledge and experiences is fundamental for the implementation of regional development and growth in Sweden.

9. Knowledge management, sharing and training - Rhône-Alpes region, France

Context and description of the good practice

In the programming period 2014-2020 France has introduced a new governance model for the implementation of ESIF. In 2014, the competencies for management and implementation of regional programmes were transferred from the French State administration (represented by prefectures) to the regional councils that got the role of Managing Authorities.

In the new set up, the main challenge was the creation of the necessary administrative capacity within the new structures. This good practice describes how competencies development has been addressed in France and specifically in the Rhône-Alpes region in the transition from the 2007-2013 to 2014-2020 programming period.

The approach was based on two pillars, respectively the transfer of human resources to the new institutions in charge of ESIF management and the ongoing development of competencies within the new institutions by means of knowledge management and sharing and formal training.

How competencies are addressed

The transfer of human resources among institutions is a legal obligation in the French public administration: when responsibilities are transferred from an institution to another, the newly appointed one has to incorporate the former staff. Only in case this is not possible, the State allows budget to the hiring of new staff.

In the case of the Rhône-Alpes Region, a European Programmes Department was set up within the regional council in 2014 to carry out Managing Authority functions for European programmes. Most of the staff employed in the prefectures (Managing Authorities in 2007-2013) was transferred to this department, thus ensuring the presence of a competencies basis.

The organizational arrangements required the integration of new staff in the Managing Authority from other departments of the Regional Council. The new staff was characterized by a diversified background and experience and was required to develop competencies in the areas of ESIF management. The approach adopted by the Department for this purpose was based on one side on knowledge management and sharing, and on the other on formal training.

In relation to knowledge management and sharing, whenever a new procedure or process needs to be developed, the management of the European Programmes department asks for volunteers and appoints a project coordinator (2-4 people in total). The purpose is making people work together, through a "Collaborative project mode", thus increasing knowledge sharing. In 2015, the approach has been used to:

- Develop a shared dashboard to collect, manage and share data about beneficiaries (contact, project follow-up)
- Improve current processes, i.e. the creation of a new agreement model (part of the application project process) that could be automatically generated by the IT system used by the department.

In order to support this process, the department has also implemented a collaborative tool called “Collabra” which enables various people to work on a unique document by sharing ideas and comments about the version in progress.

This collaborative knowledge management and sharing are accompanied by formal training in order to develop competencies.

All employees express individual training needs during the annual individual assessment, which in 2015 resulted in almost 50% of the staff participating in trainings provided by the National Centre of Territorial Public service (CNFPT) or private trainers:

STAFF INVOLVED	COMPETENCY GOAL	PROVIDER OF TRAINING
INSTRUCTORS	Specific trainings for instructors in charge of supporting beneficiaries	CNFPT (public structure that handles trainings)
TEAM LEADERS	Management	CNFPT or private trainers
INDIVIDUAL PEOPLE	Individual needs	CNFPT or private trainers

The key benefits deriving from this approach are:

- Development of capacity of the new structure in a short time frame: the transfer of staff to the Regional Council has ensured the existence of an experienced group of human resources from the moment of appointment as Managing Authority that could then transfer the knowledge to less experienced staff.
- Increased skills and motivation of employees: the knowledge management strategy is seen by employees as a springboard for skills development and many employees feel motivated by their learning achievements and the new responsibilities.
- High service quality: the global framework of the knowledge sharing contributes to providing a harmonized service quality for beneficiaries.

Conclusions and lessons learned

The transfer of staff from the prefectures to regional councils that followed the new attribution of Managing Authority functions has been capitalized in the Rhône-Alpes Region through knowledge management and sharing as well as formal trainings.

This has allowed the fast uptake of skills on behalf of individual employees with different professional backgrounds that were assigned to the Managing Authority, high levels of motivation and capacity development of the institutions as a whole.

A supportive legal framework and a structured approach to trainings have been important in this process, and the “Collaborative project mode” is a good practice that can be replicated by all institutions.

The Managing Authority aims now at collecting feedback from its employees to understand what can be valued (successes) and what can be improved (issues). Indeed, at this first stage of the analysis, the Managing Authority has identified some key issues for improvement, such as the structure of the project mode to ensure that all employees are sufficiently involved.

10. Fraud prevention activities and transparency - Sweden

Context and description of the good practice

Sweden is affected by fraud issues to a very limited extent in relation to ERDF use. However, the Agency of Economic and Regional development (Tillväxtverket) in the role of ERDF Managing Authority, has joined forces with the Swedish Economic Crime Authority in order to develop a common strategy on how to detect suspected fraud-related issues at an early stage.

The Swedish government has in 2013 established the EU Anti-Fraud Council (SEFI-Council) with the aim of promoting an effective and correct use of EU funds and coordinating action against fraud, abuse and their improper use. SEFI is a forum for collaboration and exchange of experience between authorities involved in the administration and protection of EU funds which includes Tillväxtverket and the Swedish Economic Crime Authority².

In this context, in May 2013 it was decided to establish a working group consisting of representatives of Tillväxtverket and the Swedish Economic Crime Authority to exchange experiences on measures to prevent, detect and control errors and suspected fraud in the use of EU funds. The cooperation has resulted in the organization of trainings for the staff responsible for ERDF projects and in a guide on treatment of fraud issues.

The "Guidance on the management of suspicion of fraud in connection with the management of EU funds" is a tool for the staff directly involved in the management of EU funds, and is aimed at providing guidance on how to assess if a certain conduct related to the use of EU funds should be managed as a suspicion of fraud.

The Guidance document is structured in three sections; the first one defines concepts, for instance "Fraud Suspicion", while the second section describes possible circumstances that could give rise to a fraud suspicion, i.e. provision of incomplete information, double financing, conflict of interest, contracts or purchases, grant decision, consulting and other actions. The last section, describes the typical courses of action that may be adopted in relation to such circumstances, depending on whether there is a suspicion of fraud or not.

How competencies are addressed

The strategy and the guidance document will be complemented by training staff in Tillväxtverket responsible for ERDF projects. The purpose is that the staff will be able to pinpoint any suspect or error, intentional or non-intentional, so that it can be rectified at an early stage. This means that staff needs to be trained on practical aspects; financial controlling, ERDF funding as well as project contents.

Benefits on HR and administrative capacity

In the role of Managing Authority, Tillväxtverket has assigned primary importance to the principle of legality as a prerequisite for achieving efficiency and simplification in the management of the ERDF.

² <http://www.ekobrottsmyndigheten.se/vart-arbete/samverkan/SEFI-radet/>

This has been reflected in the updating of the management and control system and through a proactive anti-corruption programme, covering also the topics of fraud and irregularities.

Training for new employees is conducted twice a year and includes anti-corruption issues (conflict of interest, suspicion of fraud, bribery and corruption and procurement), to ensure that all employees at Tillväxtverket have an understanding and insight into the problems and know the processes to be applied in cases of suspected corruption, fraud or irregularities.

Conclusions and lessons learned

The joining of forces with the Swedish Economic Crime Authority is a newly introduced element that allows for coordinated fraud prevention measures between the national level, Tillväxtverket and the Swedish ESF Council.

The cooperation has resulted in a “Guidance on the management of suspicion of fraud in connection with the management of EU funds”, in the revision of the management and control systems for ESIF and in the organization of trainings for employees covering the topics of corruption, fraud and irregularities.

11. Forum for MA and IB Coordination - Spain

Context and description of the good practice

In the period 2007-2013 the Spanish implementation system of Structural Funds comprised a single MA and 180 IBs. The IBs were national and regional authorities, that participated in all OPs and cascade delegation of IB tasks from regional authorities to other legal entities with the role of IBs was also foreseen.

In order to deal with the complexity of this organizational set-up, the Forum of Economy and Regional Policy was established as a coordination mechanism between MAs and IBs. The Forum has simplified the coordination role of the MA and has been used as a wider framework for discussion on Cohesion Policy. Forum meetings, usually around two and a half days long are organized by the MA in collaboration with a host region, with the agenda covering presentations and discussions on relevant strategic issues (e.g. Fifth Cohesion Report) as well as implementation issues such as communication plans, monitoring, audit, control and best practices.

Despite a reduction in the number of Intermediate Bodies in the 2014-2020 period from 180 to 40, the Forum of Economy and Regional Policy has been confirmed as an instrument to ensure coordination between the MA and IBs and the strengthening of the overall capacity of the system.

How competencies are addressed

The Forum is an informal meeting between MA and IBs. Contrary to the Sectorial Conferences which are official meetings of national and regional authorities on sectorial issues, the Forum of Economy and Regional Policy is a working group on technical matters that is not provided for under any legal act or internal rule of procedure. The hosting region is responsible for covering organization costs, while participants bear travel and accommodation expenses.

The Forum has been operational for over 10 years and meets from one to three times a year on a rotational basis. Its agenda includes presentations and open discussions covering, among others:

- Balance of Monitoring Committees
- Cohesion Fund
- Managing Authority
- Certification Authority
- National and regional operational programmes
- News of specific funds
- Calendar and next steps

Participants to these meetings include the Head of DG European Funds of the National government in the role of Coordinating Body, the Heads of DG European Funds of Regional governments involved in programme implementation and technical staff of public administrations.

The Forum is a good opportunity for the MA to communicate important information about ESIF implementation to different DG European Funds of Regional governments. It is a coordination and communication tool available for the public administration allowing for a fast and direct exchange of information and good practices between the bodies responsible for ESIF implementation.

Benefits on HR and administrative capacity

There are benefits in the organization of this Forum both for individuals and for the ESIF system overall. The Forum is an important learning option for civil servants involved in ESIF management as it creates peer-to-peer connections to persons in other regions with expertise on the respective functions and responsibilities. The ESIF system also benefits from the Forum, because the sharing of information and expertise improves effectiveness, quality and efficiency of the programming and implementation of ESIF.

Conclusions and lessons learned

As a consequence of the drastic reduction of the number of IBs, the Forum works in a much more efficient and effective way. In terms of organization, one of the reasons that make the Forum a good practice is the fact that it is an informal initiative without permanent structure. Most of the sources consulted agree in considering that the non-permanent nature of the Forum is the reason for its success, because it creates an environment of trust and collaboration.

The main challenge of the Forum is ensuring its own sustainability, considering the fact that it has no structure, budget or legal obligation to be implemented. Another important challenge includes adapting to the changes of the 2014-2020 Regulatory Framework.

12. EU-28 Co-financing bonuses and top-ups through TA

Context and description of the good practice

According to the 2014 Study of DG REGIO “Co-financing salaries, bonuses, top-ups from structural funds during the 2007-2013 period”, Technical Assistance has been used in all EU28 Member States to finance the salaries of approximately 24.000 people, with the status of civil servants, contractual staff and contract agents.

In a number of cases top-ups and bonuses are also co-financed. A top-up is defined as a sum of money that is given in addition to the employee's usual compensation in a regular manner, in remuneration for working on the management and implementation of ERDF/CF programmes. A bonus, on the other hand, is a sum of money given to an employee in addition to the employee's usual compensation as a one-off remuneration given to a person for managing or implementing ERDF/CF programmes.

This good practice describes the benefits of use of Technical Assistance for the payment of salaries, bonuses and top-ups, pointing out also the existing limitations.

How competencies are addressed

Salaries, top-ups and bonuses can be used by authorities involved in the management and implementation of ERDF/CF programmes as an instrument for the retention of employees and their competencies within institutions.

This is particularly relevant in institutions or national contexts characterised by low levels of competitiveness of public sector salaries compared to other sectors of the economy, thus being exposed to higher risks of staff fluctuation.

The experience of Poland shows that equalizing the salaries of staff involved in the management of EU Funds with those paid on the market for positions of similar complexity can reduce staff fluctuation (from a level of 20-25% at the beginning of the period 2007-2013, to less than 5%).

These benefits however, should always be pondered with the risk of triggering permanence in the system of employees attracted exclusively by the higher salary levels. Combining an adequate fixed remuneration with a performance related pay, may be an adequate solution to address the latter aspect.

A successful example was recently implemented in Hungary. In order to stimulate the absorption of EU funds, in the summer of 2015 the Hungarian Government issued a decree committing to the payment of a bonus to civil servants working in MAs and IBs. In case of each OP reaching 100% absorption by 31 December 2015, civil servants would be paid a bonus equal to 8 months of salary, co-financed from the TA budget. This incentive proved to be effective and motivated the staff.

Another option to stimulate staff motivation and performance consists in establishing performance based management systems linking the individual tasks assigned to employees to target indicators, subject to assessment during the employees' annual appraisal process. The risk, however, is to establish overcomplicated systems that create a burden both for employees and their supervisors. For instance criticism related to those aspects was expressed in Romania on the draft methodology for a "Performance Appraisal System for Government Officials Managing European Union Funds".

Benefits on HR and administrative capacity

There is evidence that the payment of top-ups and bonuses in addition to salaries can contribute to the retention of employees and competencies within institutions. Co-financing the related expenditure through the TA budget can therefore indirectly contribute to the development of administrative capacity.

Conclusions and lessons learned

Authorities affected by high levels of employee turnover that plan to introduce top-up or bonus schemes for employees working on ERDF and CF implementation, should consider this in the context of a broader revision of the human resources policies aimed at increasing employee retention, motivation and competencies.

Remuneration aspects could be based on a balanced mix between fixed and performance based elements, without creating an additional administrative burden for employees. In approaching these aspects authorities should also assess the need for any revision of the national legal framework required for their introduction.

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