

Flash minutes
Coordination meeting of "Learning for Change" networks (2007-2013 ESF)
Brussels, May 7, 2009

It was the first coordination meeting of the four "learning for change" networks already approved for funding by the Commission. All four networks were represented at the meeting with presentations by their leading partner. The Commission had also invited members of the support teams for the networks as well as experts contracted by the Commission (AEIDL) to join the meeting.

Mr. Philippe Hatt, new Head of Unit of EMPL B4, presented briefly the Commission's approach to support transnational cooperation under the ESF, as outlined in the Action Plan to facilitate transnational cooperation. It involves a flexible support to facilitate the implementation of transnational action in the Member States.

Key elements of the Action Plan are learning networks of ESF managers. Mr. Hatt presented the key features of the call and the rationale behind it. He also briefly mentioned the six networks shortlisted for the second deadline (which are actually in budget negotiation) and announced the launch of the second call for proposals for 2009.

Gerhard Bräunling, head of the Innovation section of Unit B4, presented the various groups involved in the networks. Those include the ESF managing authorities and intermediate bodies as networks partners and members with different degrees of involvement; national and regional stakeholders and networks (feeding experience, practice and results into the networks, and utilising its output), and different Commission services joining forces in 'support teams' which have been established for each network. This structure should generate a win-win opportunity to influence policy development.

He stressed that learning networks and communities are a new way of exchanging experience, learning and developing skills and capacities amongst peers. There is no blueprint for setting up and developing learning networks. Therefore, a preparatory phase of six months was granted to the networks – this should be used as a period to carry out a mapping exercise (“actors, actions, agendas”) for each network.

The network coordinators may also need general support in the method of establishing and nurturing networks, in which could become an issue of mutual learning between the networks, complemented by guidance by the support teams and the Commission's Experts.

Followed the presentation of the four networks:

Network for the reintegration of ex-offenders

Jurgen Hillmer, representative of the network announced that the kick off meeting was scheduled for the 28.5 in Bremen. He announced a conference in Bremen with a workshop on the OASIS system in the UK (inside to outside tracking) as well as a conference on e-learning. He mentioned input from Poland – treating ex-offenders with drug problems. He then made reference to some recent conferences such as "transfer from prison to society" in Cambridge, or a Conference on resettlement process (involving European organisations in the resettlement process) in Lisbon.

Moreover, he stressed special emphasis on the communication between the Justice and prison authorities and ESF authorities. He mentioned that the improved cooperation is the result of the EQUAL programme.

Some of the main points resulting from the questions and answers part are the following:

- The network is open for any future new partners.
- Evaluation experts will be involved in all activities of the network.
- Certain workshops prepared by the network can be hosted by a conference organised by EAC.
- The network has already a wide experience and a lot of results from Equal Development Partnerships to be mainstreamed.
- It's extremely important to bring the key actors, i.e. education, justice, labour, ESF together under the same umbrella. This should happen at national and regional level.
- There will be a workshop dedicated to women prisoners.

Javier Saez from Spain said that they'll be working with the EU network to monitor what is going on under the ESF programmes in the area. They are doing this in order to come up with some recommendation for the Spanish presidency next year.

Network on Partnership in the ESF

The Austrian representative of the "COP on Partnerships in the ESF", Anette Scoppetta, presented the new network on Partnership. She informed that the network aims for learning from experiences and sharing knowledge on partnerships, improving policy planning and delivery (further developing of partnership approaches of MS / regions) and contributing to employment policy and delivering reforms.

Managing Authorities will exchange knowledge and experience on "PEOs" (reflecting Partnership practices, exploring effects and discussing opportunities in the MS in order to enhance policy outcomes).

Country fiches as well as a Guide for Managing Authorities are already available on the website of the network. 'Policy Fora' are also available where members can ask questions to colleagues in order to receive advice. The network is open for interested persons/institutions to join).

Kick-off meeting of the network was in February 2009 in Vienna. The next meeting is programmed for June in Portugal. During the meeting they will report on findings in the OPs (12~13 altogether).

One key output of the network is the 'Partnership Learning Manual', a publication on findings of the COP and the MS's work by implementing partnerships.

Some of the main points resulting from the questions and answers part are the following:

- One of the partners is EAPN Intl.
- They also cooperate with the OECD LEED FORUM, which however is not a core partner in the network.

Network on Migrants and Ethnic Minorities

Berlin Senate representative Ulrich Raiser presented the network. This is also a network that takes up the lessons learnt in EQUAL. Migrants have formal and informal qualifications that need to be assessed. Greeks have expressed interest in joining the network. The network could as well go beyond ESF in recommendations and strategies. A Stakeholders' conference will be held in October 2009 in Berlin.

- The definition applied by EMPL to the question who is qualified as immigrant is different from the one applied by JLS. The network will rely on the national definitions – it doesn't make sense to impose one definition on the partners. ESF brochure clarifies how to define migrants.
- There is definitely difficulty of the benchmarking exercise with so many different realities. Drawing from EQUAL, the network partners have an idea what good/bad practice is. However flexible, a benchmark is necessary to give an idea what is necessary to make an example for good practice work.
- The network will look at barriers, why things don't work – it'll be rather qualitative than quantitative
- Key success factors could be an outcome of the network
- EAC made a proposal of cooperation plus the question of strategic purpose of the approach. How wide/open will the network be to other partners / activities? As EAC has a lot of activities on the subject the question raised is how can they be incorporated in the network? How will the migrant women be taken account with? Finally, How will the results be mainstreamed?
- The network is in the process of developing a dissemination strategy and they intend to integrate different stakeholders. A tool for benchmarking could be developed if it turns out to be useful.

Network on Inclusive entrepreneurship:

The presentation was made by Mechthild Jürgens from the Ministry of Labour in Germany.

- The network builds on COPIE1 (Community of Practice on Inclusive Entrepreneurship) that developed a diagnostic tool on inclusive entrepreneurship that was rolled out in 2007.
- There are four thematic CoPs /working groups each of which is led by one of the core partners in COPIE namely: Entrepreneurship education, Quality Management, Integrated Business Support and Access to Finance – micro-credit
- During the preparatory phase the experts appointed to each mini cop will carry out a baseline study which will map out the needs and experience of each partners as well as the general situation of the theme in Europe. This phase is designed to allow the partners to define what they can and want to do in far more detail, who with und where they can find useful experience at an EU level. The detailed work-plan and precise role of each partner will only be decided at this point.
- As transversal theme "action planning" will be important for the network Supporting entrepreneurial activity requires a concerted effort from a number of key actors and can

not be achieved by one Government Department or a single support structure acting alone. and need to form alliances with opinion formers.

- Next meeting to be held on 25-26 June 2009 in Brussels.

A presentation by Elissavet Platsouka from EMPL B4 on the synergies of networks and the role of the European Commission followed the presentations of the networks.

The target of the Commission is the development of sustainable learning networks on themes and issues relevant for delivering the Lisbon reform agenda, with the objective of improving the quality and efficiency of Structural Funds programmes and their impact on employment, social inclusion and training across the EU and contributing to policy development at EU level through on one hand exploiting opportunities for learning for programme managers, strategic stakeholders, governmental departments in charge of policy supported under the ESF and practitioners for learning and on the other hand capitalising on good practice under the ESF OPs 2007-2013 (in particular from innovative action and transnational cooperation).

A question and answers session followed the presentations. Some points are the following:

- A problem was communicated by the ex-offenders network: It concerned partners in the networks, justice / prison administration. Due to the crisis the situation changed, so administrations had to decrease their budgets by 30% in many cases. The ESF authorities are covering the costs of their justice / prison colleagues. But in some cases **they refuse to do it**.
- There will be at least 16 workshops with expert practitioners. As most of them are involved in projects from other programmes, the Commission was asked whether it would be possible for them to cover their travel from other projects. The migrants' network faces similar problems, however not so severe.
- To the question if shifts in budget decisions have to be reported to the EC or is there a ceiling the answer was that provided that the work programme doesn't change (which requires EC's approval) the shifts can be either within a budget heading or up to ten percent of the budget heading the money is shifted to
- To the question about how the leading partner of the project transfers his responsibilities to his partners, when he has no technical possibility to verify the costs other partners bear the answer was that he should have them explicitly declare that the costs claimed (declaration of their honour) are eligible under the grant contract.
- Concerning "pre-financing" the EC representatives urged the networks' representatives when there is any change at all in their bank account details, to inform as quickly as possible. The change takes time to be incorporated in the system.
- Special mention was made that the pre financing is 30% of the EC contribution. Any subsequent payments may be made on the basis of interim reports.
- The first report after six months is mainly on the content – unless there's a budget change.

- A subjects about which web page could be used for communication between the networks was brought up. The networks' representatives underlined the important role of the Commission as a mainstreaming mechanism.

- It was made clear by the Commission that the networks could make use of the experts (AEIDL) only through the Commission.

Since all people present found the meeting very useful, the Commission promised to hold coordination meeting with the approved networks in steady intervals.

Attachments: All presentations from Networks and the Commission as well as the list of attendees (total 6 documents).