



MANUAL ON THE MANAGEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION STRUCTURAL FUNDS

2nd edition, 2006

written by **Brian Harvey**
with support from the **EAPN Structural Funds Task Force**



EUROPEAN ANTI POVERTY NETWORK



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**EAPN
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Preface

The European Anti-Poverty Network holds the view that the Structural Funds have considerable potential to combat poverty, social exclusion and inequality. It is worth reminding ourselves of the scale of the problem. At present, 72m people live below the poverty line in Europe and almost 19m people are unemployed. Hardship has a disproportionate impact on women and children and affects a range of marginalized and vulnerable groups such as migrants, minority ethnic groups and people with disabilities.

The European Union has engaged in action against poverty since the 1970s and the objective of combating exclusion is now part of the treaties. The Lisbon strategy, adopted in 2000, gave significant commitments to the reinforcement of the goal of social inclusion. The reformed Structural Funds, about to enter their fourth programming period of 2007-2013, are a substantial resource available for the improvement of Europe's social and economic well-being.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have been closely involved in the struggle against poverty and social exclusion for many years. These NGOs range from small, community-based urban and rural organizations to larger groups providing social services to national federations and coalitions. In 1990, many of these groups came together to form the European Anti-Poverty Network. The role of such networks in the struggle against exclusion was recognized by the European Union in its white paper on the role of NGOs and foundations (1997). That of NGOs and civil society was acknowledged in the subsequent white paper on governance (2001).

This manual is concerned with how NGOs may best influence the management of the Structural Funds so that they may be effectively directed toward the reduction and elimination of poverty and social exclusion in Europe. It is not a policy document on the Funds, nor simply a guide as to how NGOs may be smarter at obtaining the Funds. Instead, it looks at the way in which the Structural Funds are designed, planned, publicized, delivered, monitored and evaluated - in other words how they are managed and how NGOs may play their part in that process. The manual is rooted in the practical, on-the-ground experience of NGOs in the current round of the Funds (2000-6) and looks forward to the new programming period (2007-2013). Examples from different states are cited or summarized at frequent intervals. The manual does not attempt to achieve a perfect, equal representation of each member state - among 25 that would be difficult - but tries to convey an overall picture of the past, present and potential future management of the Structural Funds. The countries that contributed combine a mixture of large and small states, the 'old' and 'new' Europe, from the north to the Mediterranean Sea, from the west to the Baltic states, as well as different models of development.

The main chapters of the manual (2-7) take the following form:

- The Structural Fund framework under a number of key headings: information, planning and partnership, social inclusion, monitoring and evaluation, technical assistance;
- The reality, for NGOs combating poverty and social exclusion, based on the experience of EAPN members in the different states. The manual gives practical detail and tries to convey the situation on the ground;
- Suggestions, in the form of a checklist, of action which social inclusion NGOs could take to ensure their participation in the management of the Structural Funds. The checklists are at the end of each chapter;
- Additional information and good practice provided in panels.

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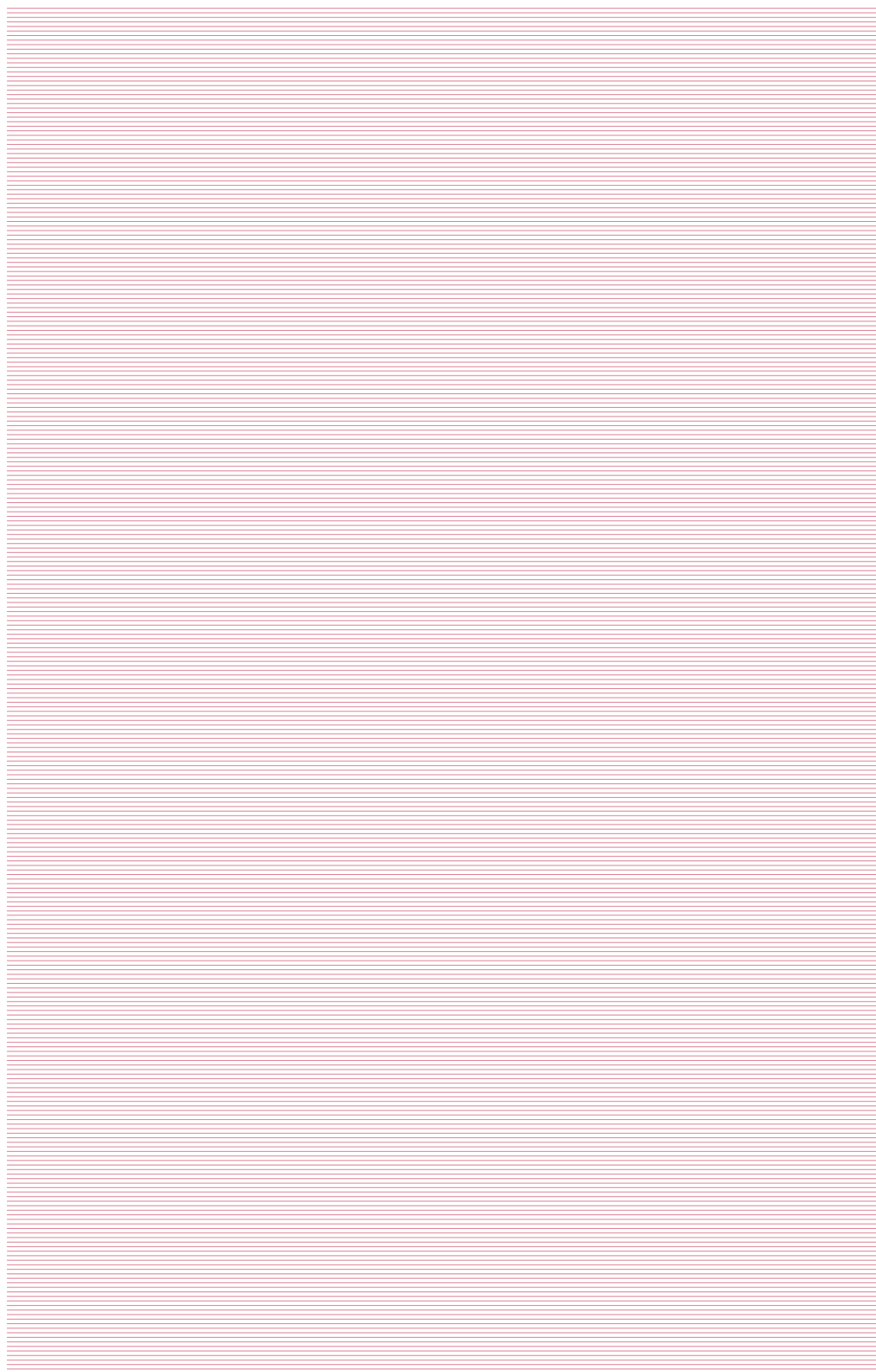
Britain:

Ray Phillips

Banques Alimentaires, France

In the case of Malta, additional information was compiled by the government's managing authority in the Office of the Prime Minister and the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity, European Social Fund Unit.

Many thanks to Corinna Faith who captured the photographs of European funded projects across the UK. These were originally collated for a publication produced by TSEN and ACED during 2005 called *What has being European Done for Us?* For further information contact Tamara Flanagan on tflanagan@csv.org.uk



Chapter 1

How the Structural Funds work

First, the manual describes the Structural Funds: what they are, how they are agreed, how they operate, how they are financed and their purpose. Key comparisons are made between the 2000-6 Structural Funds and those proposed for 2007-13.

1.1

THE FUNDS

The Structural Funds are the second largest part of the budget of the European Union, second only to the Common Agricultural Policy. Traditionally, there were five Structural Funds (though technically, the last two were termed 'financial instruments'):

- European Regional Development Fund (ERDF);
- European Social Fund (ESF);
- European Agricultural Guidance & Guarantee Fund (EAGGF, also called FEOGA Guidance);
- Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIFG); and the
- Cohesion Fund.

For 2007-2013, there will be only three Structural Funds: the ERDF, the ESF (the two main ones) and the Cohesion Fund. The EAGGF will become the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and will operate separately from the Structural Funds.

Although the Structural Funds date historically to the 1960s, they were reformed as a grouped package in the late 1980s and made part of five-year, then seven-year, programming periods. These were 1989-93, 1994-9, 2000-6, 2017-2023. Broad budgets are set down for each programming period within the European Union's overall budget, called the Financial Perspective (FP).

1.2

THE PROCESS

The Structural Funds are the outcome of a complex set of negotiations at European level. The broad procedure is as follows:

- The European Commission makes broad proposals for the next round of the Structural Funds. This takes the form of a policy document e.g. *Agenda 2000* (1997), *Third cohesion report* (2004). The lead body is the Directorate General for Regional Affairs (DG REGIO) in the European Commission, followed by the Directorate General for Employment and Social Affairs (DG EMPL).
- These are then discussed by the institutions of the European Union (Council of Ministers, Parliament, Economic and Social Committee, Committee of the Regions). National and regional governments, as well as other interested parties make their views known (social partners, civil society).
- The Commission then proposes regulations to put these proposals into effect. This takes the form of one large general regulation, accompanied by shorter regulations specific to the individual Funds. Once the regulations are approved by the Council of Ministers, the Parliament and the Commission, they become law. For 2007-2013, policy guidelines are also issued (> *The guidelines*, panel).
- Member States publish plans as to how they propose to spend the Structural Funds in their state. These are often called National Development Plans.

- Negotiations then take place between the Commission and each member state to agree on precisely how the Funds will operate in each state, ensuring that they are compliant with the regulations. The Commission may reject plans or operational programmes that do not appear to be consistent with Community objectives or priorities. Once agreed, both sides sign off on an appropriate legal document (> 1.4 *Putting the Structural Funds into operation*, below). Systems are put in place to ensure that the Funds are properly tracked, audited, accounted for, monitored and evaluated.
- Funds are then paid out in stages and according to various time schedules. Almost all involve the spending of national, regional or local Funds to match European Union money (co-funding).

Although the Structural Funds come from Brussels from money raised by the European Union, the actual spending of the money is negotiated between the European Commission and the member state governments. One does not ‘apply to Brussels’ for Structural Funds. Most of the Structural Funds are allocated by national governments to their own departments and agencies, where they are co-funded.

There are some exceptions. First, the European Union has a small amount of money available for technical assistance at European level, money available for management, publicity, Europe-level evaluation and studies. Second, for the years 1988 to 2006, the European Union ran Community Initiative Programmes (CIPs), supporting themes of European interest in all the Member States. Unlike the main, ‘national’ part of the Structural Funds, Community Initiative Programmes were designed in Brussels. They also had their own regulations and functioned in accordance with agreements between the Commission and each member state. The proportion of Structural Funds devoted to CIPs fell from 9% in 1994-9 to only 5.35% in 2000-6. No money was allocated for 2007-2013 and the CIP themes and methods in cross-border development, equality, rural development and urban development are supposed to be mainstreamed.

1.3
THE OBJECTIVES

The Structural Funds are allocated according to objectives, generally three. The term ‘objective’ can be confusing: although it normally applies to an geographical area, it can also apply to a theme. The following are the objectives of the Structural Funds, comparing 2000-6 (left columns) to 2007-2013 (right columns):

Objective	2000-6	2007-2013	Objective
1	Areas where gross domestic product is less than 75% EU	Areas where gross domestic product is less than 75% EU average	Convergence
2	Areas undergoing economic conversion (both zoned)	The rest (unzoned)	Competitiveness
3	Adaptation and modernization of systems of education, training and employment (theme)	Cross-border cooperation	Cooperation

Within the three new objectives for 2007-2013, the Commission set down a number of key themes (See panel *Structural Fund themes proposed for 2007-2013*). Member States are encouraged to focus on these themes, but the subsequent draft regulations give Member States a broad scope of potential activities to undertake.

The levels of financial assistance also vary, being up to 75% in objective 1 or convergence areas and up to 50% in the others. The thrust of Commission policy is to focus resources on objective 1 or convergence areas, as the following table illustrates.

Objective	2000-6	2007-2013	Objective
1	69.7%	78%	Convergence
2	11.5%	18%	Competitiveness
3	12.3%	4%	Cooperation
Reserve	4%	3%	Reserve
Technical assistance (EU level)	0.25%	0.3%	Technical assistance (EU level)

Objective 1/convergence is the easiest to describe. Although the terms ‘objective 1’, ‘objective 2’ and so on date back some time, they have been dropped from the terminology of the 2007-2013 round. ‘Objective 1 areas’ were always the poorest parts of the European Union, or ‘areas lagging behind in development’. For the early part of the 2000-6 period, they comprised Greece, most of Portugal and poor parts of the more developed states. The new ‘convergence’ areas, as they will now be called, will comprise most of the new Member States and some other areas from the old objective 1:

Objective 1 areas, 2000-6	Convergence areas, 2007-2013
Greece	Most of Greece
Portugal except Lisbon	Portugal, except Lisbon, Algarve
Border, Midland, Western Ireland	Slovenia
Spain, except north east	Southern Spain
Eastern Germany	Most of eastern Germany
Southern Italy, except Molise	Southern Italy, except Molise
France: overseas departments	France: overseas departments
Britain: South Yorkshire, West Wales,	Britain: SW, West Wales
Cornwall & Scilly, Merseyside	Slovakia
Austria: Burgenland	Czech Rep. except Prague
Sweden, Finland: thinly populated areas	Hungary
New Member States from May 2004	Latvia
	Lithuania
	Estonia
	Poland
	Malta

To complicate matters further, some regions are ‘phasing out’ of objective 1.

Objective 2 areas for 2000-6 applied to areas undergoing economic and social conversion. About 18% of the Union’s territory was so zoned. Of the 18%, the majority were industrial areas in change (10%), declining rural areas (5%), urban areas in difficulty (2%) and depressed areas dependent on fishing (1%, total 18%).

For 2007-2013, objective 2 areas are retitled ‘competitiveness’ areas. Instead of applying to particular zones, ‘competitiveness’ areas are all the rest of the Union - in other words, those not part of objective 1 or the convergence areas. These are, by definition, the wealthier parts of the Union.

Objective 3 was not a geographical area, but a theme applying to those parts of the Union not zoned for objective 1 or 2. Here, the European Union supported European Social Fund projects to modernize human resources and policies in the areas of education, training and employment. This objective disappears in this form in 2007-2013.

In 2000-6, there were four Community Initiative Programmes (CIPs):

- INTERREG, for cross-border cooperation;
- URBAN, for urban development;
- LEADER, for rural development; and
- EQUAL, for equality and human resource development.

EQUAL was the most relevant to non-governmental organizations and the struggle against social exclusion, with more than two thousand such projects supported. NGOs also participated, though to a lesser extent, in the other three CIPs.

There are no Community Initiative Programmes in 2007-2013. What happens is as follows:

INTERREG becomes the 'cooperation' objective
(it might have been called objective 3);

Member States are invited to submit model urban projects;

LEADER continues under the new European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development; and

EQUAL disappears, but its principles must be mainstreamed.

INTERREG is effectively upgraded to the level of a full Structural Fund objective. Here, the Commission proposed that a new legal entity, a European Grouping of Cross-Border Cooperation (EGCC), comprising regional and local authorities, be charged with responsibility for implementing cross-border programmes and Funds in each border area.

LEADER becomes a priority axis in the new European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). LEADER local action groups will continue in operation and new groups will be added. In the case of URBAN, Member States are invited to submit more than 70 cities suitable for funding under a package of specific action, possibly through a global grant. Regrettably, no specific measures were proposed in the *Third cohesion report* to ensure the future of EQUAL, but steps were eventually taken in the Community Strategic Guidelines.

Mainstreaming EQUAL

The Community Strategic Guidelines state that:

The successful experience of the EQUAL Community Initiative, which promotes an inclusive society by combatting discrimination and exclusion is mainstreamed across all actions to further build on partnership, empowerment, innovation and transnational cooperation, allowing Member States to share good practices (#5.5)

Cohesion Fund

In addition, the Cohesion Fund operates in Member States whose Gross National Income is less than 90% of the European Union average. The fund was introduced in 1994 for the four poorest Member States at the time: Spain, Portugal, Greece and Ireland. The Cohesion Fund focusses on transport and environmental projects and is important to NGOs concerned with these issues. The Cohesion Fund brings a much higher level of financial assistance: 85% of the costs.

Structural Fund themes proposed for 2007-2013

Innovation and the knowledge economy

Environment and risk prevention

Accessibility and services of general economic interest

Reforms for full employment

Improving quality and productivity at work

Inclusion and cohesion

1.4

PUTTING THE STRUCTURAL FUNDS INTO OPERATION

As may be seen, the Structural Funds operate according to an agreed set of objectives, Funds and programmes, within a framework policy (*Agenda 2000, Third cohesion report*). For 2000-6, Member States were invited to draw up a National Development Plan or similar document outlining how they would spend Structural Funds. Following this, formal agreement was reached between the Commission and each member state agreeing how precisely this would be done: this document was called either a Community Support Framework (CSF) or a Single Programming Document (SPD). Typically, CSFs or SPDs had a series of priorities, programmes and measures outlining in more detail how the Structural Funds would be spent. A further document would then be issued by the Member States detailing the measures even more, including target groups and indicators to measure progress: this was called the Programme Complement (PC). The bodies actually executing the Structural Funds, called the managing authorities, were identified.

The system for the 2007-2013 round is different. Here:

- The Commission issues Community Strategic Guidelines (CSGs) outlining broad objectives for the Structural Funds in all the Member States.
- In response, each member state draws up a National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) outlining how the Structural Funds will be spent, respecting the terms of the guidelines, the CSGs. The NSRFs are much shorter than the previous CSFs or SPDs, leaving out several bottom layers of detail. This time, there are no Programme Complements. Member States may also draw up a National Development Plan if they wish, but this is not obligatory.
- Operational programmes follow the NSRF. They continue to be the subject of a formal agreement between the Commission and the Member States. The main dialogue between the Commission and the Member States will be on the NSRF and the subsequent, legally binding operational programmes. In effect, the Member States are given more freedom to manage the Structural Funds - but they must do so within the regulations and within the broad parameters agreed in the Community Strategic Guidelines. Because the guidelines give commitments to social inclusion, it is important for NGOs to ensure that National Strategic Reference Frameworks comply with them.

The Community Strategic Guidelines comprise three guidelines with 12 sub-headings. They speak of:

- The importance of strengthening and promoting social inclusion;
 - The need for greater institutional capacity to ensure the effective delivery of the Structural Funds;
 - The importance of improved governance in the operation of the Funds.
- > 4.1 *Social inclusion in the 2007-2013 proposals.*

Community Strategic Guidelines 2007-2013

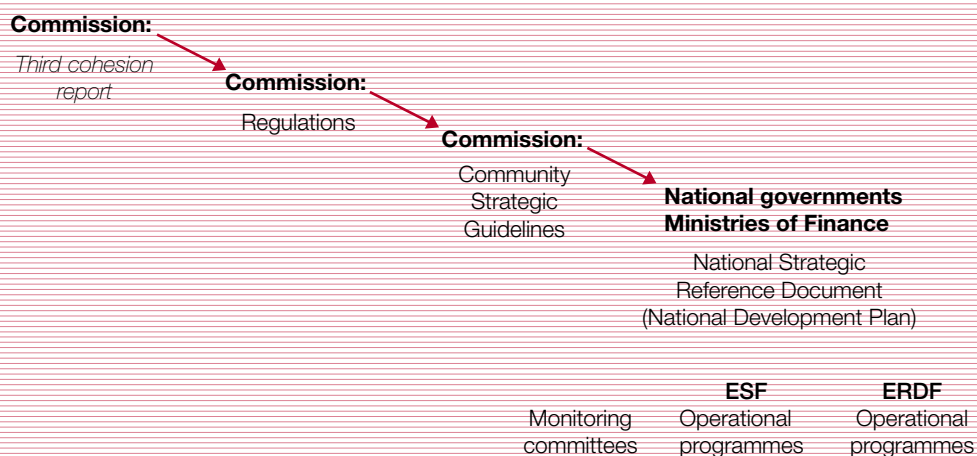
- I Make Europe and its regions more attractive places to invest and work
 - 1 Expand and improve transport infrastructure
 - 2 Strengthen the synergies between environmental protection and growth
 - 3 Address Europe's intensive use of traditional energy sources
- II Improve knowledge and innovation for growth
 - 1 Increase and improve investment in research, technology and development
 - 2 Facilitate innovation and promote entrepreneurship
 - 3 Promote the information society for all
 - 4 Improve access to finance
- III More and better jobs
 - 1 Attract and retain more people in employment, modernize social protection systems
 - 2 Improve adaptability of workers, enterprises and flexibility of the labour market
 - 3 Increase investment in human capital through better education & skills
 - 4 Build administrative capacity
 - 5 Help maintain a healthy labour force

The formal title and reference to the guidelines is *Communication from the Commission - cohesion policy in support of growth and jobs: Community Strategic Guidelines, 2007-2013*. COM 2005/299, Brussels, 5th July 2005.

This is the broad background. Next, in chapter 2, we examine where to get more information on the Structural Funds.

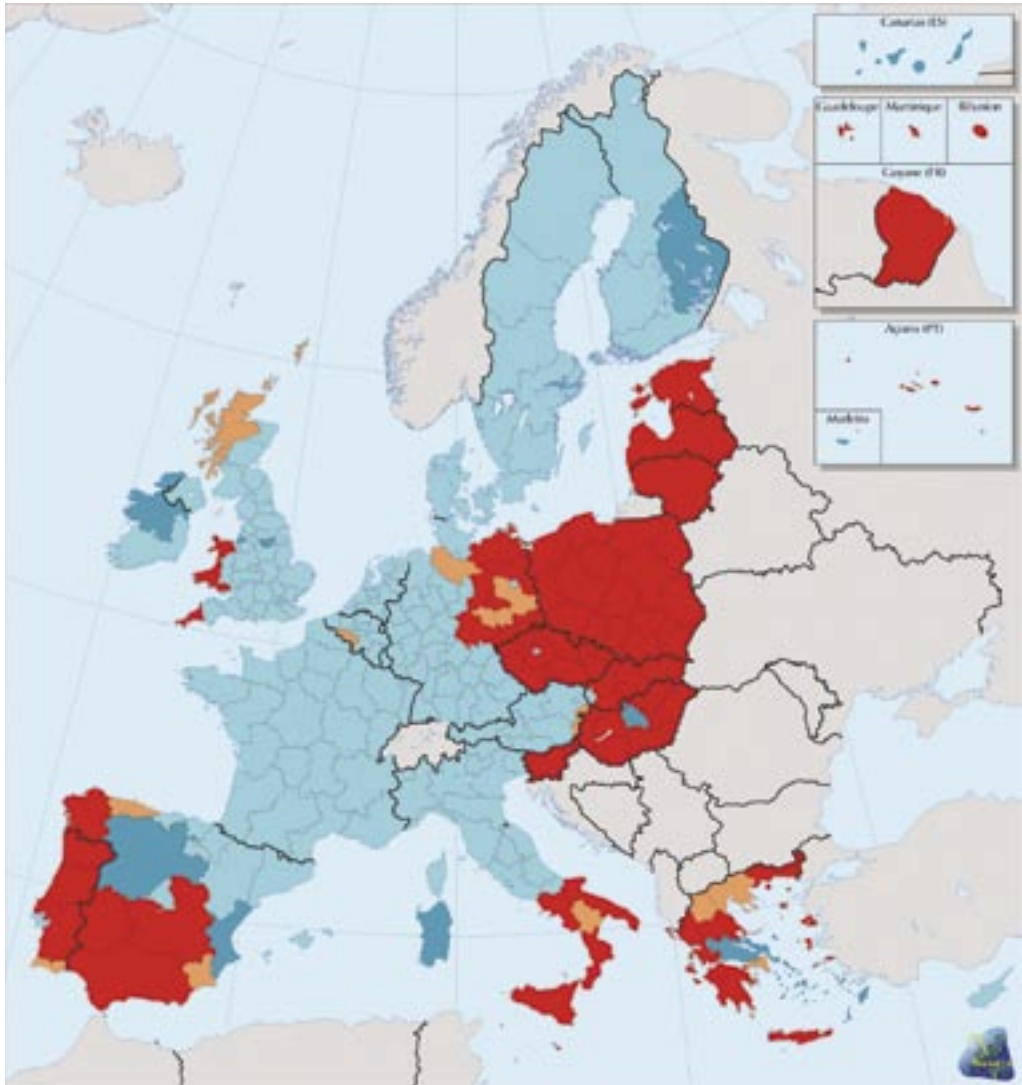
How the Structural Funds work (2007-2013)

simplified diagram



EU25:

Convergence and Competitiveness Objective 2007 - 2013



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- Convergence Regions
- Phasing-out Regions
- Phasing-in Regions
- Competitiveness and Employment Regions

Chapter 2

Information

For non-governmental organizations interested in the Structural Funds, a prerequisite is obtaining good information. This chapter outlines the information systems for the Structural Funds and the experience of non-governmental organizations in obtaining such information.

Before doing so, it should be remembered that the managing authority has responsibility, under the present general regulation, for pro-actively publicizing the Structural Funds to all citizens and specifically to ensure that potential final beneficiaries, trade and professional bodies, economic and social partners, bodies promoting equality between men and women and the relevant non-governmental organizations are informed about the opportunities afforded for assistance (#46). In the draft general regulation, the Member States are enjoined to ensure that assistance from the Funds is 'transparent' (#68).

2.1

STRUCTURAL FUNDS AT EUROPEAN LEVEL

At European level, the main documents are:

Policy: the main policy documents outlining the Funds:

- *Agenda 2000* (2000-2006) and the
- *Third cohesion report* (2007-2013).*

(*Its full title is *Toward a new cohesion for Europe - convergence, competitiveness and cooperation, the third report on economic and social cohesion*, but the shorthand term *Third cohesion report* is widely used). The arrangements between the two were somewhat different. *Agenda 2000* was a report dedicated to the future of the Structural Funds from 2000. By contrast, the *Third cohesion report* was one of a series of large, regular look-back reports and the proposals for the new programming period were added in an annexe at the end.

Regulations: the main regulatory documents are the general regulations and the shorter specific regulations for each fund. These are:

For 2000 - 2006

- General regulation: 1260/99, published in the official journal 21st June 1999.
- Specific regulations for each fund, as follows:
 - 1784/99 European Social Fund
 - 1783/99 European Regional Development Fund
 - 1263/99 Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance
 - 1257/99 European Agricultural Guidance & Guarantee Fund
 - 1264/99 Cohesion Fund

For 2007 - 2013

- Draft general regulation;
- Specific draft regulations for each fund: European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Social Fund (ESF), Cohesion Fund, with a regulation for the European Grouping for Cross-Border Cooperation for the cooperation objective.
- Outside the Structural Funds, *Proposal for the support of rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)*.
- Draft Community Strategic Guidelines. These were published in 2005 and sent to the Council of Ministers for negotiation and approval.

Once the draft regulations are approved, each new regulation will have a final designator in the official journal. > References to the drafts: COM 2004/492 (general regulation), 2004/493 (ESF), COM 2004/494 (Cohesion Fund), COM 2004/495 (ERDF), COM 2004/496 (cross-border) and 2004/490 (EAFRD), all published on 14th July 2004.

2.2

STRUCTURAL FUNDS AT NATIONAL LEVEL

At national level, the main documents in each country are:

For 2000 - 2006

National Development Plan.

Community Support Framework or Single Programming Document.

For each operational programme, an Operational Programme and a Programme Complement.

The National Development Plan is in effect the country's plan for how it wishes to spend the Structural Funds. Governments try to draw up the national development plan to conform to the Commission's requirements, but in the course of negotiations, some parts of the national development plan can be dropped, other parts changed and new parts added.

The situation with the Community Support Framework (CSF) or the Single Programming Document (SPD) can be complicated. Each country has a CSF or a SPD (SPDs are more normal for small countries). A region will probably have a SPD but could have an Operational Programme (OP). An Operational Programme (OP) generally covers a region or a theme operating in a number of regions, or all regions of the country. Each Community Initiative Programme has an operational programme. For every operational programme, there is a Programme Complement (PC). This is really a tool of the monitoring committee and can be changed by the monitoring committee (approval from Brussels is not required). Thus the 2000-6 round was governed by over a thousand OPs.

For 2007 - 2013

National Strategic Reference Framework.

National Development Plan (not obligatory).

Operational Programmes, as before, but no Programme Complements.

The National Strategic Reference Framework document is expected to be much shorter than the earlier CSFs or SPDs and must respect the priorities of the Community Strategic Guidelines (> Chapter 1: *How the Structural Funds work*). Member States may draw up national development plans with more detail if they wish, but they are not an essential part of the process and do not require Commission approval.

Operational programme documents generally follow a similar format: dark blue in colour, they list the context of the programme, aims, objectives, priorities, measures to be undertaken, monitoring and financial systems. Some are short, some long; some clear, some not so clear. For NGOs, they are indispensable if they are to follow the management of the Structural Funds in detail.

2.3

WHERE TO GET INFORMATION

Generally, these European and national documents are available from:

- The Commission in Brussels, within the appropriate Directorate Generals (DG REGIO, DG EMPL). Both DG EMPL and DG REGIO have units led by 'heads of unit' assigned to each country (normally a grouping of two or three countries per official). These heads of unit are sometimes called desk officers (> *Official directory* in *Useful publications*, panel).
- National governments: principally the department or ministry responsible for the Structural Funds (often the Ministry of Finance) or other government departments and their websites;
- Commission walk-in public offices in the Member States.

These key documents are supplemented by a wide variety of analytical and promotional material. These include occasional reports on individual Funds, programmes and projects. The best places to source this material are the Commission offices, the DG REGIO and DG EMPL websites and the appropriate desk officers. Various forms of Structural Fund documentation may also be published by government departments and agencies and their information services. Many university libraries also function as European Information Centres. They receive a broad range of information on the condition that any citizen may have free access to read such reports.

Key Commission websites

Structural Funds generally are the responsibility of the Directorate General for Regional Affairs (DG REGIO). The European Regional Development Fund is the responsibility of DG REGIO. The European Social Fund is the responsibility of the Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities (DG EMPL).

To find these websites:

Click on the general European Union portal:
<http://europa.eu.int>

Choose your language

You will be offered 'Activities', 'Institutions' etc.
Go to 'Institutions'
Go to 'Commission'
Go to 'Regional Affairs' (DG REGIO) or
'Employment and Social Affairs' (DG EMPL),
as appropriate.

The top page of DG REGIO has several sections on the Structural Funds, while DG EMPL has a section for the European Social Fund.

Key documents to get

2000-6:

Agenda 2000, general regulation,
specific regulations
National Development Plan
Community Support Framework/
Single Programming Document
Appropriate Operational Programmes,
Programme Complements

2007-2013

Third cohesion report, general regulation,
specific regulations
Community Strategic Guidelines
National Development Plan (if there is one)
National Strategic Reference Framework

2.4

SOCIAL INCLUSION NGOs AND INFORMATION

So much for the framework. What actually happens in practice?

In Belgium, the main sources of information are the European Social Fund units in the ministries of labour and work at the federal level and in the French community and the Flemish community. They publish three manuals: one for project promoters, one for partnership and one accounting manual. The unit has a good, accessible website and also publishes explanatory brochures. Although information is published on social inclusion, it is always in the context of the labour market.

In Cyprus, the Structural Funds are publicized by the government's Planning Bureau. The key source of information is *The Structural Funds of the European Union in Cyprus*, published in English and Greek. Information is available either there, or on the website (www.planning.cy). Separate information is not available on the individual Funds, nor on the role of the Structural Funds in combating exclusion.

In the Czech Republic, there is one central website, with all the relevant documents and information: www.strukturalni-fondy.cz, managed by the Ministry for Regional Development, also the managing authority for the Community Support Framework. All the operational programmes and explanatory material are available on-line and the different ministries also publicize their own operational programmes. Information on the social inclusion aspects of the Structural Funds can be found at the site of the Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs, www.mpsv.cz. Information on the European Social Fund is available at www.esfcr.cz.

The Ministry of Economics and Business Affairs is responsible for the Structural Funds in Denmark. The main information source on social affairs and the Structural Funds is a dedicated website, www.socialfonden.dk. There are separate information sources for the European Social Fund, European Regional Development Fund, FEOGA and Cohesion Fund. Information is available on-line, in printed documents, with explanatory brochures. Operational documents are readily available. Information flow on the European Social Fund and combating poverty is good.

Responsibility for the Structural Funds in Germany falls to the Ministry of the Economy and Labour in the federal government, the National Employment Agency and the 16 states or *Länder*. German anti-poverty NGOs use, as their key information sources, the Länder operational programmes and the operational programme for objective 1 areas. There are separate sources of information for each of the different Funds, both published and on the internet. German anti-poverty NGOs do now have good information on the Structural Funds and the role of social inclusion, but largely because they have a well organized network to collect and distribute such information.

In Spain, information on the Structural Funds is published on the websites of the various ministries. The one most used by NGOs is the website of the European Social Fund Administrative Unit (*Unidad Administradora del Fondo Social Europeo*) (www.mtas.es/uafse). Small NGOs are still not yet in the habit of visiting websites and the contents of the programmes run by the autonomous regional governments do not appear to be accessible. Some brochures and leaflets have been published, but they only reach organizations involved in Community Initiative Programmes. Calls for applications are published in the state journal (*Boletín Oficial del Estado*). Information days are held.

Estonia has a special web address for the Structural Funds: www.struktuurifondid.ee, where details are available of priorities, measures and contacts. The Ministry for Financial Affairs has overall responsibility. Each priority has its own implementing agency which has its own website. Estonian anti-poverty NGOs obtain their information from implementing agencies, operational programmes and through information days. There are websites for each of the different Structural Funds and one dedicated to the EQUAL programme (www.tta.ee/equal). Information is available on how the Structural Funds combat social exclusion and the overall quality of information is good.

Different managing authorities and ministries are responsible for the Structural Funds in Hungary. Information on the different Funds and operational programmes is available through their websites and it is even put up in English as well (www.nfh.hu/angol/index2.htm). Operational programme documents are all available, both in full-length and summary versions. Explanatory brochures are available both in printed form and for

downloading in PDF format. Although dedicated information on the Funds and social inclusion is not available, there has been a strong emphasis on making information available to help applicants use the right terms and language to apply for projects. Although good information is available on the internet, small rural communities which do not yet have internet access are disadvantaged in the process.

In Ireland, the body responsible for publicizing the Structural Funds is the Community Support Framework Information Unit, a division of the Department of Finance. The key information sources used are the Community Support Framework, the National Development Plan and the operational programmes. Web-based information is available from the National Development Plan site (www.ndp.ie) and the European Social Fund site (www.esf.ie). Overall, the information picture is good, but only a small amount of information is available on social inclusion and the Structural Funds.

Information on the Structural Funds in Italy comes from the various ministries, particularly the Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs. The Community Support Framework, National Action Plans and Regional Action Plans are all published in official journals and on websites, especially regional websites which have dedicated sections on the Structural Funds. NGOs must obtain information themselves and are not sent details directly and apart from objective 3, there is no specific information on the role of the Structural Funds in the struggle against exclusion. Positively, brochures and leaflets are published by ISFOL, *Istituto per lo sviluppo della formazione professionale dei laboratori*, the Institute for the Development of Workers Vocational Training.

In Poland, ministries and implementing bodies are responsible for publicizing the Structural Funds. NGOs rely, for their information, on the sectoral and regional operational programmes (www.fundusze-strukturalne.gov.pl) and do a considerable amount of work to publicize the Structural Funds themselves (www.ngo.pl). As part of this general website, more detailed information is available on the European Social Fund (www.efs.gov.pl). Specific information on the role of the Structural Funds in combating exclusion is quite poor. NGOs can access general information on the Structural Funds but are not sent thematically targeted information.

NGOs are in no better or worse a situation in receiving information about the Structural Funds than anyone else.
- Portugal

The best source is the internet
- Poland

The government and its various ministries are responsible for publicizing the Structural Funds in Lithuania. The main source of information is the Common Programme Document (called the BPD in Lithuanian), available from the Ministry of Finance, which is the lead institution (www.finmin.lt). Information is distributed by the internet, in newspapers and on TV, in brochures, seminars, conferences and educational programmes. These were free until 2005, when charges were applied. Information is available from government departments (websites and brochures), the central project management agency (www.cpva.lt), the support foundation (www.esf.lt) and other agencies. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour does make available information on the role of the Funds in combating social exclusion, but not enough.

In the Netherlands, NGOs rely for Structural Fund information from the Ministry of Social Affairs and international networks like ATD Quart Monde.

In Portugal, information from the Structural Funds is available from government departments and agencies, while the management committee for the Community Support Framework has issued guidelines and held open seminars. There is a single website for the Community Support Framework (www.qca.pt) with operational programmes and data about the Funds. There are dedicated websites for each of the Funds. Managers of individual programmes have publicized these programmes and measures using publications, seminars, phone lines and press announcements. For the operational programme on employment, training and social development (called POEFDS in Portuguese), there is an Information Bulletin covering strategies, measures, projects, results and interviews, a Directory of projects and newsletters.

In Britain, the lead government department for the Structural Funds is the Department of Trade and Industry, with the Department of Work and Pensions and the Department of Education responsible for the European Social Fund and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister responsible for the European Regional Development Fund. NGOs regard operational plans and programming documents as the key sources of information: these are available on-line and on paper. Information can be obtained from government office websites and from training networks funded by technical assistance at programme, national and sub-regional level. Government offices and training networks funded by technical assistance do make information available about the role of the Funds in combating social exclusion.

The main source of information on the Structural Funds in Malta is the Single Programming Document and its accompanying Programme Complement, available from the managing authority's website (www.ppcd.gov.mt). Separate information on the European Social Fund is available at www.esf.gov.mt. Despite this, NGOs combating poverty in Malta did not feel that they received information on good quality about the role of the Structural Funds in combating poverty.

For the Banques Alimentaires in France, the key texts are the FEOGA regulations of 1987 and 1992 (to be precise, 3730/87 and 3149/92 respectively), published in the Official Journal.

What most governments do	What good governments do
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Website✓ Explanatory brochures	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Specific material on the Structural Funds and social inclusion✓ Provide information on the different Funds on the website✓ Offer key documents for downloading - summary and full versions✓ Target information to NGOs✓ Allocate technical assistance to NGOs to inform themselves✓ Use other forms of media apart from the internet (press, TV, conferences, seminars, phone lines). Information bulletins and project directories (Portugal). National manuals on the Structural Funds: promoters, partnership, accounting (Belgium)

Information training in Poland

To prepare for the Structural Funds, a 'Euro NGO programme' was established and put into operation. Ten to 17 people were trained in each *voivodship* (region), a total of 203 people. Of these, 94% were awarded a certificate. These 203 people were then able to provide information on the Structural Funds to NGOs in their region; advice on applying for the Funds; training in procedures and animation of the NGO sector itself. They subsequently organized a total of 215 training sessions and 184 meetings, with over 11,000 participants, including representatives of 2,600 NGOs. In 2004 alone, they responded to 4,300 information requests, provided advice in 1,500 cases and held 500 consultations. NGOs proposed 160 projects as a direct result. The NGO experts made a specific point of reaching out to small towns and the remote rural areas. The training work received welcome support from the local government authorities, who helped to organize many meetings. The Polish NGO office in Brussels was able to ensure that information on Structural Fund developments was always up to date.

> More information: www.ngo.pl, www.splot.ngo.pl, www.eu.ngo.pl

2.5

CONCLUSIONS: 'COME AND GET IT'

The situation concerning the availability of information on the Structural Funds has improved enormously over the past five years. During the previous programming period, NGOs in some countries found it extremely difficult to get any information on the Funds. Key documents were not well known and even at times appeared to be closely guarded. This situation has been transformed. All Member States publish key Structural Fund information on government internet sites. NGOs are able to identify the key documents: National Development Plans, Community Support Frameworks, Single Programming Documents, operational programmes. All countries appear to have additional sources of information for the different Funds and many NGOs are familiar with the information published on the European Social Fund. The system is not internet dependent, for all governments make use of paper documents and explanatory brochures.

Having said that, few governments appear to have pro-active strategies to publicize the Structural Funds. In all the countries above, the information was there, but people must find it and come and get it themselves. This would be fine, if all citizens lived on an equal playing field of information, but excluded people do not. Apart from published material and the internet, few countries used other forms of publicity, such as newspapers, TV, seminars and conferences, the approach followed by Lithuania. A more systematic approach was evident in the broad variety of information methods used in Portugal. The most enlightened systems were evident in Britain, where NGOs may obtain technical assistance to improve the level and quality of information on the Structural Funds.

A second criticism is that little of the information relates to social exclusion. No country appears to specifically concern itself with the role of the Structural Funds in combating social exclusion. Where information on social inclusion was available at all, it was confined to a limited band of programmes, mainly within the European Social Fund. This raises a serious question about how effective the Funds can be in combating poverty, if basic information about the role of the Funds is not available for this purpose. The availability of technical assistance in Britain at least provides a mechanism whereby this gap can be bridged, but it seems to be the only such case (> *Technical assistance*, chapter 7).

Useful national sites

Cyprus: www.planning.cy

Czech Republic:

general: www.strukturalni-fondy.cz;

social inclusion: www.mpsv.cz;

European Social Fund: www.esfcr.cz.

Denmark: www.socialfonden.dk

Spain: www.mtas.es/uafse

Estonia: www.struktuurifondid.ee

Hungary: www.nfh.hu/angol/index2.htm

Ireland: www.ndp.ie

Poland: www.funduszestrukuralne.gov.pl

Lithuania: www.finmin.lt

Portugal: www.qca.pt

Malta: www.ppcd.gov.mt

Useful European websites

European Anti Poverty Network:

www.eapn.org

Platform of European Social NGOs:

www.socialplatform.org

Euro Citizen Action Service:

www.ecas.org

Europa website:

<http://europa.eu.int>

Polish NGOs:

www.ngo.pl

Useful publications

European Commission:

Structural Actions 2000-6 - Commentary and Regulations.

€9.50 from Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, L 2985 Luxembourg.
ISBN 92 828 7767 1.

Greater London Enterprise:

Fast Forward Grants - Report on the London ESF Global Grants Programme Fast Forward Grants 2002-3.
Greater London Enterprise, 28 Park st, London SE1 9EQ, tel 00.44.207.403.0300, mail@gle.co.uk,
www.gle.co.uk

European Commission:

Official Directory of the European Union.

€50 from Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, L 2985 Luxembourg.
ISBN 92 78 40258 3

Daniel Guégin:

The New Practical Guide to the EU Labyrinth. 7th edition, 2005,

ISBN 2 930409 01 0,

€25 from EIS Publishing, Europe Information Service, avenue Adolphe Lacomblé 66, B 1030 Brussels,
tel 322.737.7709, fax 322.732 6757, e: eis@eis.be

2.6

CHECKLIST

Here are some suggestions for social inclusion NGOs interested to improve their knowledge of the Structural Funds:

- ✓ Do you have copies of the key European documents?
- ✓ Do you have copies of the key national documents?
- ✓ Do you keep up to date by visiting national and European Structural Fund websites?
- ✓ Are you in contact with the Commission desk officers responsible for your country?
- ✓ Do you read critical, independent reports and analyses of the Structural Funds?
- ✓ Are you involved in national and European networks that work on Structural Funds?
- ✓ Do you ask government to devise pro-active strategies to distribute quality, relevant information on the Structural Funds? Do you ask government to provide specific information on the role of the structural Funds in combating poverty? Do you ask for technical assistance so that such information can be made available?
- ✓ Have you organized your own network to distribute information on the Structural Funds?

Chapter 3

Planning, design and partnership

This chapter outlines how the Structural Funds are designed and planned. Special attention is given to the important issue of partnership.

The procedure for planning a round of the Structural Fund takes about two years. The present regulation specifies that:

- The preparation of Structural Fund operations in each member state is a function of a partnership between regional and local authorities, other competent bodies, economic and social partners and any other relevant competent bodies;
- Partnership shall involve preparation, financing, monitoring and evaluation;
- Member States shall submit a plan to the Commission, drawn up by the competent authorities and after consultation with partners, who must have a defined period of time in which they can present their views.

The Community Support Framework must include a statement of strategy and priorities. Operational programmes must include priorities, targets and a description of measures proposed. Programme complements must include details of measures, monitoring indicators and the definition of final beneficiaries. Single Programming Documents must include statements of strategy and priorities and a summary of measures planned. Major projects (over €50m) must be subjected to cost-benefit analysis with an analysis of the socio-economic benefits. Additionality (added value) is a clear requirement in designing the Funds: in order to achieve a genuine impact, the Funds must not replace public or other equivalent spending by the member state.

3.1

WHICH PARTNERS? WHAT FORM AND QUALITY OF PARTNERSHIP?

In establishing partnerships, Member States are required to create a 'wide and effective association of all the relevant bodies, according to national rules and practice, taking account of the need to promote equality between men and women and sustainable development through the integration of environmental protection and improvement requirements'.

The Third cohesion report on partnership

Representatives from civil society should become increasingly involved through appropriate mechanisms in the design, implementation and followup of [Structural Fund] interventions.

In practice, both the partners and the nature of partnership have proved to be problem areas. Governments have found it difficult to acknowledge NGOs in general and social inclusion NGOs in particular as true partners. Even when they have, the quality of partnership has sometimes been poor, with NGOs given a peripheral role and all the important decisions being taken by government with little consultation.

What the Community Strategic Guidelines say about partnership

Promoting civil participation in the formulation and implementation of public policies, as well as improving interaction between and within communities, can contribute to the creation of human and social capital, leading to sustainable employment, growth, competitiveness and social cohesion.

Partnership is essential to the elaboration and implementation of development strategies and relies on consultation and participation of stakeholders such as the competent authorities, economic and social partners and representatives of civil society including non-governmental organizations (3.5).

For 2007-2013, draft article #10 of the general regulation proposed an extension of partnership to civil society and non-governmental organizations, by defining the partners as follows:

- Competent regional, local, urban and other public authorities;
- Economic and social partners;
- Any other appropriate body representing civil society, environmental partners, non-governmental organizations and bodies responsible for promoting equality between men and women.

Each member state shall designate the most representative partners at national, regional and local level and in the economic and social or other spheres, hereinafter 'partners'. The member state shall ensure broad and effective involvement of all the appropriate bodies in accordance with national rules and practices and taking account of the need to promote equality between men and women and sustainable development through the integration of environmental protection and improvement requirements. The partnership shall cover preparation and monitoring of the national strategic reference framework as well as the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the operational programmes. Member States shall involve each of the appropriate partners and particularly the regions in the various programming stages within the time limit set for each stage.

The gender perspective must be promoted during the various stage of implementing the Funds.

The draft ESF regulation proposed (#5) that:

The Member States and the managing authority of each operational programme shall ensure the involvement of the social partners and adequate consultation of non-governmental stakeholders, at the appropriate territorial level, in the programming, implementation and monitoring of ESF support.

This wording was welcomed by EAPN, for it would bring the Structural Funds into line with the improved recognition of civil society and NGOs in European and national policies. The mention of 'non-governmental organization' proved to be contentious within the Council of Ministers and the final text has yet to be decided.

But what if national governments still pay little attention to partnership? Here the way in which Member States approach partnership during the early phases of a Structural Fund programming period is

crucial. Here, social inclusion NGOs must work hard to influence the national bodies responsible for the Structural Funds, most likely the national Ministry of Finance. The European Commission cannot force Member States into an enlightened form of partnership. The Commission's only sanction is that it will not approve an operational programme that clearly makes no effort at partnership. But in the ongoing dialogue between the Commission and the member state, the Commission will ask *What is the nature of the partnership in your country? What is the quality of that partnership? Who is involved and how?* The officials in the Commission who will ask that question are the desk officers responsible for that country (>2.3 *Where to get information*). Keeping your desk officer, the head of unit responsible for your country, up to date and briefed on the operation of partnership is therefore important. If the member state continues not to observe the partnership principle, contrary to the regulations, then it is possible to make a formal complaint to the Commission. This is a very simple procedure and takes the form of a written complaint to the Commission office in the member state (>2.3). The Commission is obliged to investigate formal complaints and such an action will put the member state under additional pressure to follow a more constructive form of partnership.

The illusion of consultation

The EuroCitizen Action Service (ECAS) report *The illusion of inclusion* (2004), focussed on partnership in the new Member States of eastern and central Europe, showed that:

- Only a few governments consulted with non-governmental organizations.
- Consultation took place at early stages of the writing of national development plans, but not during the later stages. It was during these later stages that documents were changed most.
- Consultations were often very rushed, with little effective time for NGOs to make a useful contribution.
- Where there was consultation, it was very difficult to see whether or how these views had been listened to, if at all.
- Few governments, if any, had any proper consultation plan.
- Only one government (Estonia) issued a report on the consultation process itself.

> *The illusion of inclusion*, from Euro Citizen Action Service, rue de la Concorde 53, B 1050 Brussels, Belgium, www.ecas.org

> See also *Public eye on the EU Funds: civil society involvement in the structural, cohesion and rural development funds - examples from central and eastern Europe*. CEE Bankwatch Network and Friends of the Earth Europe, 2005, tel 322.542.0180, info@foeeurope.org

3.2

SOCIAL INCLUSION NGOs IN DESIGN, PLANNING AND PARTNERSHIP

In Belgium, the Structural Funds are designed by the three ministries of employment at work (federal, French, Flemish). NGOs are not consulted at the federal level. Although NGOs are recognized as Structural Fund partners, only a limited range is selected, comprising trade unions, affiliates of the political parties and religious groups. Very few are independent NGOs. NGOs concerned with social exclusion are not part of the partnership.

In Cyprus, the Structural Funds are designed and planned by the government's planning bureau. Social inclusion NGOs have not yet been involved in a partnership process.

The Ministry for Regional Development is responsible for planning the Structural Funds in the Czech Republic. For the 2004-6 programming period, national sectoral NGOs and intermediary NGOs with contacts in the regions were invited to participate as partners. Social NGOs have not met any major obstacles in being accepted as partners with state and regional governments. NGOs reacting to proposals on the website and willing to join the consultation system found the doors opened for them. In the event, the design process turned out to be unsystematic, chaotic and disorganized, but is expected to improve next time. Environmental NGOs are involved in most operational programmes. For 2007-2013, Czech NGOs are, through the Centre for Community Work and Association of NGOs, involved in national seminars, roundtables, e-bulletins and e-conferences in contributing to the new National Strategic Reference Framework and National Development Plan.

Telling government what proper consultation looks like

In advance of the 2007-2013 programming period, Czech NGOs presented their government with a consultation plan, saying how they should be consulted. This aimed to make the process structured, accountable and transparent. The proposal is expected to be treated seriously by the government.

In Denmark, the Structural Funds are planned by the Ministry of Economic Affairs together with the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Employment, other ministries, local authorities and trade organizations. NGOs are consulted only in respect of specific programmes, not the Structural Funds as a whole. Social NGOs were recognized as partners for the HORIZON and INTEGRA programmes in 1994-9, but have not specifically sought national partnership.

In France, the Ministry for Social Affairs organized in 2005 a consultation for the National Strategic Reference Framework for the 2007-2013 period and two leading NGOs were invited to participate with the regions, departments, cities, social and economic partners.

The Structural Funds in Germany are designed and planned by the appropriate federal ministries. The only way in which NGOs can make their views known is through comments made at monitoring committee meetings, where they receive 'thick documents a few days in advance'. Small amendments are possible when NGOs work in collaboration with other organizations, such as trade unions and women's groups. In Germany, the recognized Structural Fund NGO partners are the five large welfare organizations, though they do not include the German Anti-Poverty Network. Social inclusion NGOs sought such a partnership, but this was not accepted. 'NGOs are treated as junior partners. Governments don't want us in their business of doing policy and delivering the Funds, but we are a step further than we were in the 1990s'.

In Spain, the Structural Funds are designed by the various ministries, working with the autonomous regions. In general, NGOs are not consulted, though some social organizations were consulted occasionally about the Community Initiative Programmes (CIPs) 'more for information purposes than design'. The Women's Institute and the Social Services Institute are formally recognized as Structural Fund partners. For the first time, NGOs were recognized as partners not only in the CIPs but the main programmes - this time within the operational programme for combatting discrimination: Caritas, The Red Cross, the General Secretariat for Gypsies, Diagrama Foundation, ONCE Foundation, Luis Vives Foundation. The National Strategic Reference Framework (*Marco Estratégico Nacional de Referencia*) for 2007 - 2013 was drawn up by the Ministry of Finance with the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs. Brief information was given to four national NGOs participating in the thematic operational programme against discrimination (*Lucha contra la discriminación*) but NGOs were neither actively involved nor consulted. The Spanish European Anti Poverty Network drew up its own proposals, with training sessions, workshop and working group.

In Estonia, the Structural Funds are designed and planned by the ministries responsible, led by the Ministry for Financial Affairs. Only in rare cases are NGOs consulted about Structural Fund design (one example being the Union of NGOs) and they tend to be the more powerful and strong ones. NGOs tend to be consulted only in social or sectoral areas (e.g. the Union of Child Welfare on children's issues), not on the plan as a whole. NGOs are formally recognized as partners but in reality they comprise only about 5% of the participants in the process. It is unclear how the government selects its NGO partners, but it tends to select the bigger, financially stronger NGOs. About ten social inclusion NGOs have been consulted, such as the Tallinn Child Support Centre. 'They ask us for statistics and opinions about some issues'.

The Development Policy Coordination Interministerial Committee (DPCIC) plans and coordinates the Structural Funds in Hungary. NGOs are not fully welcomed as Structural Fund partners. The Act on Regional Development allows for NGOs to delegate a common representative to the relevant regional and national councils, but this opportunity is open only NGOs working in the field of environmental protection or equality between men and women.

The Structural Funds in Ireland are planned by government. There are several problem areas. First, there is little evidence that the views of NGOs are actually listened to very much. Second, consultation is focussed on NGOs that have endorsed a national policy agreement with the government (called *Sustaining progress*), not the broader range of NGOs more critical of government social policy. NGOs that did not support *Sustaining progress* were expelled from their positions on a number of monitoring committees. For 2007-2013, the European Anti Poverty Network Ireland sought and got a meeting with the Department of Finance, the body responsible for drafting the National Strategic Reference Framework, at a very early stage in the drafting process.

There is no formal mechanism to involve NGOs in the planning and design of the Structural Funds in Italy. Social partnership in Italy has been limited to employers and trade unions. The Structural Funds are planned by the relevant ministries and by a central government - regional government conference. Some regional governments may hold some consultation meetings with NGOs. ISFOL (*Istituto per lo sviluppo della formazione professionale dei laboratori*, Institute for the Development of Workers Vocational Training) organizes conferences and seminars for implementing bodies concerned with labour market issues. NGOs have only been consulted where they operate as training bodies implementing programmes. NGOs have entered partnerships with provincial and local authorities for local level projects and programmes (e.g. EQUAL).

In Poland, the Structural Funds are designed by the implementation authority responsible. NGOs are recognized as Structural Fund partners, although social inclusion NGOs have not specifically sought social partnership. Consultation, when it takes place, is carried out mainly over the internet, which means it is a very broad, general and poorly targeted process. Sometimes consultation takes place through the Public Benefit Council, an advisory council to government involving NGO representatives. Despite this, consultation is often *pro forma*, insufficient, the frameworks inadequately developed and the outcomes poor.

Making partnership work in Poland

The Polish NGO office in Brussels established a secretariat to assist Polish NGOs in their participation in the consultation for the National Development Plan for 2007-2013. Among other activities, the office ran a special section on the www.npr.ngo.pl website, which published documents, the opinions and comments of NGOs and an e-mail discussion group. Regional Structural Fund experts encouraged discussions in the regions of Poland and the SPLOT network ran a microgrant scheme to facilitate NGOs to have discussions on the National Development Plan. NGOs were also invited to participate in regional government-sponsored conferences. The Polish NGO office felt that critical to the success of the NGO involvement in the consultative process was bringing together a team of NGO experts knowledgeable about consultation systems, able to assess government documents and capable of providing commentaries and sector-specific documentation and close cooperation with appropriate governmental bodies. The government was prepared to share early drafts of the National Development Plan with NGOs and coordinate some of its consultation activities, an especially positive feature of the process. Over a thousand NGOs took an active part in the NDP consultations and the document itself changed dramatically by the end of the process.

Governments and ministries plan the Structural Funds in Lithuania, but consultation with NGOs, which is done through seminars, seems limited to particular sectors and activities. NGOs are formally recognized as Structural Fund partners, but the partnership is mainly through projects and through the larger NGOs.

In Portugal, negotiation of the Structural Funds falls to the Agency of Coordination of the 3rd Community Support Framework, comprising government departments, while management is the responsibility of the Commission of Management of the CSF. The European Social Fund is managed by IMESF, the Institute for the Management of the European Social Fund. NGOs are consulted about the Structural Funds, but only indirectly through the Economic and Social Council and only big NGOs belong to the council. The involvement of economic, social and civil society organizations is encouraged in the drawing up of regional development programmes.

In Britain, NGOs are very much involved in the design and planning of the Structural Funds. They are the UK European Network, the four national umbrella bodies (Scottish Council for Voluntary Organizations, Wales Council for Voluntary Action, Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, Third Sector European Network) and regional training networks, supported by technical assistance. Their success in influencing the planning and design has been mixed, winning in some areas but not in others. NGOs and social inclusion NGOs have been recognized as Structural Fund partners from the 1980s and such NGOs have been especially strong at grass roots, street level.

Partnership and respect

Our contributions have been respected and we have been financed by national governments to research such difficult areas as capacity building. There is much left to do to open up the Structural Funds to make them more targeted and democratic, but we have far more room within the Funds to do this than any other comparable funding programme.

- Britain

In Malta, the Single Programming Document was drafted by the Planning and Priorities Coordination Division. The document was drawn up in consultation with various social partners and civil society, which were selected through the Malta Council for Economic and Social Development and the Civil Society Committee. Nine sectoral working groups were established 'in order to achieve a common vision': this included one for social policy and each was asked to consider the horizontal themes of the environment and gender equality.

The sectoral strategies fed into a draft Single Programming Document (SPD) which was published, sent for consultation to the Malta Council for Economic and Social Development and civil society representatives and presented at two workshops to which all citizens were invited. A CD-ROM of the draft SPD was sent to all citizens and it was posted on the Planning and Priorities Division website, with contributions invited. Media articles on the draft SPD were prompted to generate public discussion. NGOs are recognized as Structural Fund partners through the Malta Council for Economic and Social Development appointed by the prime minister. Four are formally recognized (National Council for Women, Nature Trust and Friends of the Earth, the Farmers Central Cooperative Society and the National Cooperative tas-Sajd). Eleven social inclusion NGOs have sought partnership within the EQUAL programme (e.g. Red Cross, Emigrants Commission, women's organizations).

Maltese NGOs working in the area of social inclusion do not regard this process as positively. They were not consulted in the design of the Structural Funds, nor were they recognized as Structural Fund partners. According to EAPN Malta, 'although there seems to be no specific system excluding them, the lack of information given directly to NGOs has led to no participation or involvement'. Furthermore, the Maltese Council for Economic and Social Development includes only one social NGO, the National Council of Women and there is no system whereby it is linked to social inclusion NGOs.

In France, the Banques Alimentaires were recognized as partners and beneficiaries of the food aid programme as far back as 1987 by the Ministry for Social Affairs, along with three other NGOs (Secours Populaire, Restaurants du Coeur, Croix Rouge) and that remains the case to this day.

What partnership is not

- X Consulting NGOs only on the 'social' parts of the Structural Funds
- X Consulting 'for information, not design'
- X Limiting the NGO role to running a few projects (project partnership only)
- X Selecting only uncritical, safe, tame NGOs for consultation
- X Dealing only with a small number of large, powerful NGOs
- X Sending out big thick documents and giving a few days to respond
- X Asking NGOs for their views, but then ignoring them
- X Assuming social NGOs are represented through one or two big umbrella bodies
- X Consulting once all the main decisions have already been taken

3.3

SOCIAL INCLUSION NGOs AND PARTNERSHIP: CONCLUSIONS

In most but far from all countries, NGOs are now formally recognized as Structural Fund partners. Despite this, the recognition falls short of what is possible, for three reasons. First, governments seem to consult NGOs only on a limited range of Structural Fund actions in the social, environmental and equality field, not on the plan as a whole. Second, some governments appear to have a narrow conceptualization of partnership, one in which it is limited to projects rather than policy. Third, governments tend to consult only with certain NGOs and not always social inclusion NGOs.

Governments appear to go through several stages in the evolution of partnership:

ACCEPTANCE OF THE PRINCIPLE OF PARTNERSHIP
EXTENDING PARTNERSHIP BEYOND THE CLASSIC SOCIAL PARTNERS (EMPLOYERS AND TRADE UNIONS)
EXTENSION BEYOND ENVIRONMENTAL AND GENDER NGOs
EXTENSION BEYOND 'SAFE' NGOs TO THE ALL THE NGO FAMILIES

Similarly, the planning and design process appears to go through a number of stages and dimensions. Several governments have not got far beyond publishing a plan and inviting one round of comments. Design is a complicated process and a sophisticated planning process will:

- Have consultation at several stages (beginning, middle, end);
- Be broad, drawing in a wide range of opinion;
- Be deep, inviting a depth of comments, for which detailed documents must be provided;
- Be sectoral as well as general;
- Use a variety of methods to reach out to a wide range of groups, communities and citizens;
- Be critical, inviting not just safe participants and look at several development models;
- Be transparent, stating the planning system and time schedules before it starts;
- Be accountable, giving a report on the process afterwards.

What's a good consultation process? What governments can - and should - do:

- ✓ Recognize NGOs as full social partners, including social inclusion NGOs
- ✓ Operate an open door policy to NGOs in Structural Fund design and planning
- ✓ Publish a consultation plan and timetable, with clearly outlined, distinct stages
- ✓ Ensure there is plenty of time for each stage: beginning, middle, end
- ✓ Provide technical assistance for NGOs engaging in consultation
- ✓ Share plans and draft documents at the earliest possible stage. Make new versions available promptly.
- ✓ Use working groups for specific themes and involve NGOs in them
- ✓ Use several forms of media to spread knowledge about the consultation: websites, paper publications, press, CD-ROM
- ✓ Involve NGOs working with the most excluded (e.g. Roma, gypsies)
- ✓ Show how comments have been incorporated - and if not, why not
- ✓ Report on the consultation process afterwards - who was consulted, how, what was said, how the plans were modified as a result

3.4

CHECKLIST

Although governments have not been good at involving NGOs in Structural Funds planning or consultation, there is much that social inclusion NGOs can do. Have you:

- ✓ Asked to be consulted in Structural Fund 'consultations'?
- ✓ Specifically sought an involvement in the new National Strategic Reference Framework documents?
Have you drafted your own position for your national NSRF?
- ✓ Told the government what a good consultation process should look like?
- ✓ Protested if you have not been consulted?
- ✓ Made your views known in any case?
- ✓ Briefed the Commission desk officers responsible for your country?
- ✓ Commented on national plans, Community Support Frameworks, Single Programming Documents, National Strategic Reference Frameworks, operational programmes?
- ✓ Exposed and criticized inadequate forms of partnership?



Chapter 4

Social inclusion

Social inclusion is an important field of European Union policy. The European Union funded projects against poverty as far back as 1975. Fifteen years later, the Council of Ministers passed a resolution on social inclusion (1989). In 1997, social inclusion was recognized as an official area of work for the Union by article 39 of the Treaty of Amsterdam. But how important is social inclusion in the Structural Funds?

4.1

SOCIAL INCLUSION IN THE 2007-2013 PROPOSALS

The draft general regulation for the Structural Funds for 2007-2013 describes social inclusion as one of the important challenges facing the competitiveness regions. Through the European Social Fund, the Structural Funds will support existing policies for social inclusion. Reinforcing social inclusion and combating discrimination is one of four policy priorities.

Social inclusion is an important aspect of the draft Community Strategic Guidelines (> Chapter 1, *How the Structural Funds work*). The need for balanced economic, social and environmental policies is stressed at several points in the guidelines, as is the importance of promoting social inclusion. Guideline 4.1.1, *Expand and improve transport*, requires that due account be taken of environmental and social implications of infrastructure projects and that the dominance of road transport be balanced by alternative modes, with accessibility to common public transport services for target groups such as older and disabled people. Guideline 4.2.4, *Improve access to finance* proposes there be outreach to specific groups, such as young or women entrepreneurs or those drawn from disadvantaged groups such as ethnic minorities. Guideline 4.3: *More and better jobs* stresses the need to promote socially inclusive societies and labour markets for disadvantaged people and combat poverty. An important priority is to ensure inclusive labour markets for people at disadvantage or at risk of social exclusion, such as early school leavers, long-term unemployed people, minorities and people with disabilities. There must be pathways to integration and to combat discrimination, social support and care services, with the development of the social economy. Later sections of the guidelines (5.1) deal with urban policy, stressing the need to tackle social exclusion, support community development and ensure access to key services.

4.2

SOCIAL INCLUSION IN THE FUNDS NOW

Social inclusion is a declared objective of the Belgian Structural Funds and up to 52% are spent on social inclusion. The Funds available to the Ministry for Social Integration are useful, but they are targeted toward people looking for work in the labour market and people on the minimum wage, not toward those seeking social integration outside the labour market. Social inclusion was little mentioned during the debate on the Structural Funds plan.

In Cyprus, the 2004-6 Structural Funds were designed with great speed, giving priority to economic development, with little time for discussion on its wider aims and objectives. As a result, the Funds are only indirectly related to social inclusion. Only NGOs concerned with employment issues and the environment were really involved. In the future, there will hopefully be a wider discussion and a broader involvement of groups, taking in social inclusion.

In the Czech Republic, social inclusion was considered in the planning of the European Social Fund. The social NGOs network, SKOK, participated in ESF and social inclusion working groups. Social inclusion is one of four priority topics in the operational programme for human resource development. About 10% overall of the Structural Funds may be estimated to address social exclusion. The principal groups targeted are:

- Ethnic and other minority groups;
- Mothers with children;
- People with disabilities;
- Socially vulnerable groups from deprived areas;
- Unemployed people, especially young unemployed people;
- Released prisoners;
- Persons with addiction;
- Older citizens; and
- Immigrants and asylum-seekers.

There are no significant omissions in the targeting process. The importance of the gender dimension to social exclusion is stressed repeatedly.

In Denmark, social inclusion is considered in the design stage of the Structural Funds, through the views of the Council for Socially Marginalized People, an independent group set up by the Ministry of Social Affairs. Social inclusion is a declared objective of the Danish Structural Funds, excluded groups are targeted and the gender dimension is taken into account. There is concern that social inclusion may be less important in the future, if Structural Funds budgets are reduced as resources move to the east. The Structural Funds have been an important, much valued supplement to national measures and there is an on-going need for resources of this nature.

In Germany, social inclusion is considered in the planning of the Structural Funds only to fulfill the minimal legal requirements of the European regulations. The European Social Fund is the main part that addresses issues of exclusion, with considerable resources used for young people and migrants. There is a strong focus on labour market inclusion, rather than a broader ideal of social inclusion, with targeting of young people, migrants, long-term unemployed and disabled people, with good account being taken of the gender dimension.

In Spain, social inclusion objectives are evident in the operational programme for combatting discrimination. (*Lucha contra la discriminación*). The main target groups identified are immigrants, emigrants, excluded young people, convicts, Roma, disadvantaged women and people with disabilities. In general, European Social Fund programmes are geared to employment rather than social inclusion objectives. The ERDF is used very little to support social objectives.

Social inclusion is not mentioned directly as an objective of the Structural Funds in Estonia, but it is in practice because target groups are identified. 'Fighting poverty' is not directly mentioned and everything is described as 'activating groups through work'. In practice, social inclusion objectives are found under the human resources theme. About 25% of the Estonian Structural Funds may be considered to be devoted to social inclusion, focussed on young people, unemployed people and women, with good account being taken of the gender dimension. The Structural Funds appear to miss older people, children and people with disabilities.

The relationship between the Structural Funds and social inclusion is difficult to discern in Hungary and there is little specific information on this point. The Funds are very much aimed at labour market integration and miss groups like the elderly. Some account is taken of the gender dimension, for example projects to integrate women into the labour market, but it is not really mainstreamed.

Social inclusion is strongly named as an issue in the Irish Structural Funds and there is a horizontal coordinating committee on equality and social inclusion. Social inclusion is one of the objectives of the current Structural Funds, with investment provided in education, training, childcare, lifelong learning, skills development and community services - although some amounts can be small and difficult to access. The

government claims that as much as 40% of the Funds goes to social inclusion, but it may not really be so high and may be less than effective than in the past. The main excluded groups are targeted, especially unemployed people, early school leavers and those needing childcare, especially lone parents. Gender is both targeted and monitored. The structural Funds have been important in Ireland, but they have been imbalanced, concentrating on physical infrastructure (e.g. roads) and subsidizing some industries (e.g. tourism) in ways that do not always translate into employment or local benefits. Despite commitments to poverty-proof and gender-proof all measures of the Irish National Development Plan, Irish NGOs criticize the exercise as tokenistic, causing much frustration for NGOs concerned with poverty and equality issues.

In Italy, social inclusion issues are addressed only very marginally in the Structural Funds planning process and are limited to objective 3 and economic and employment issues. Little attention is otherwise given to social and cultural programmes, with the exception of the Community Initiative Programmes like EQUAL. Italian Structural Fund projects conform broadly to the groups identified as excluded at the European level e.g. people with disabilities, early school leavers, young unemployed, prisoners and people with drug addictions. Gender is taken into account and there is a specific action plan developed by the Ministry for Equal Opportunities, but more could still be done.

Social inclusion is not a declared objective of the Structural Funds in Lithuania. Consultation with Lithuanian NGOs concerned with social inclusion is insufficient and there is not enough room for projects concerned with social inclusion.

Some operational programmes in Portugal have a specific strand or axis concerned with social inclusion. The most effective programmes are POEFDS and EQUAL. EQUAL is aimed at supporting social and community development, the integration of people with disabilities and disadvantaged groups, cooperative and social development. There is a specific gender pillar and gender impact must be assessed. Following the mid-term review of the Structural Funds in Portugal in 2003, which found that no statistics on social inclusion were available, economic and social cohesion was declared to be one of three new strategic lines for the remainder of the programming period.

In Britain, NGOs are active in influencing the social inclusion dimension to the Structural Funds - in defining the disadvantaged target groups, in prioritizing spending for them and in steering resources to community economic development and building the capacity of local communities. Social inclusion is a declared objective of the Structural Funds in Britain and this is evident in the three objective areas: the pathway programmes of objective 1; about 15% to 25% of objective 2 going to the community economic development priority; and about 35% to 40% of objective 3 going to the disadvantaged groups priority. The Funds in Britain have historically championed inclusion programmes. Specifically, they have targeted long-term unemployed people, the young unemployed, the economically inactive, lone parents, minority ethnic groups, refugees and asylum seekers, people with disabilities, voluntary carers, mentally ill people, homeless people, drug abusers, prisoners and ex-offenders and people with literacy and numeracy problems. They have not targeted children, older people or people in poverty with no relationship to the labour market. The Funds have not sufficiently addressed the gender dimension, specifically women in programme management and ownership or support for childcare.

In Malta, social inclusion issues were included in a number of the sectoral plans. Priority 2, measure 2.3 of Malta's Single Programming Document aims to include disabled and socially excluded persons in the labour market through specific employment schemes and the EQUAL programme is an important part of the Funds. 16.9% of the ESF allocation is devoted to social inclusion, apart from general measures for unemployed people. Target groups are identified by the ESF as unemployed people, women, youth, people with disabilities, over 40s, semi-skilled or unskilled workers, single parents, people in institutional care, labour market returners, ex-offenders, homeless people and other vulnerable groups. Gender issues are a horizontal priority for all Structural Funds, not just those targeting excluded people.

CONCLUSIONS: SOCIAL INCLUSION AND THE STRUCTURAL FUNDS

Social inclusion is a declared objective of the Structural Funds in most Member States, prominently so in a number of countries. With one or two exceptions, there appears to have been good progress in taking the gender dimension into account. The targeting of the Structural Funds appears to have been another strong point. Social inclusion NGOs report evidence of effective targeting toward a range of excluded groups (> panel *Groups targeted and missed by the Structural Funds*). Critically, though, some groups seem to have been missed, which is an opportunity to rectify the problem for 2007-2013. How much of the Funds address social inclusion in each member state is unclear, with estimates varying wildly from 10% to 52% and the basis for these estimates being unclear.

There are ways in which the social inclusion dimension of the Structural Funds could still be strengthened. Social inclusion is still seen very much as the function of employment programmes and seen through a narrow prism of 'labour market integration', even though the regulations are now much broader and permit a wider range of activity to be funded. Social inclusion should equally be a priority for the European Regional Development Fund and that is a challenge for the next round.

Groups targeted - and missed by the Structural Funds

Targeted

- Ethnic and other minority groups e.g. Roma
- Mothers with children
- People with disabilities
- Socially vulnerable groups from deprived areas
- Unemployed people, especially young unemployed people
- Released prisoners, convicts
- Persons with addiction
- Older citizens
- Immigrants and asylum-seekers
- Homeless people
- Over 40s

- People in institutional care
- Low - skilled, unskilled workers
- Lone parents
- Young people
- People with numeracy and literacy problems
- Carers
- Mentally ill
- Economically inactive people
- Early school leavers
- Emigrants
- Disadvantaged women

Missed

- Older people
- Children
- People considered outside the workforce

4.4

CHECKLIST

- ✓ Does the National Development Plan, Community Support Framework or Single Programming Document give priority to social inclusion? Is social inclusion an over-arching objective? What proportion is actually devoted to social inclusion?
- ✓ For 2007-2013, does the new National Strategic Reference Framework give a priority to social inclusion? Does the framework reflect the priority given to social inclusion in the Community Strategic Guidelines?
- ✓ Is social inclusion a prominent aspect in the planning, design and debate on the Funds?
- ✓ Which socially excluded groups are targeted? Can those that have been missed in 2000-6 be brought into the 2007-2013 plan?
- ✓ Is social inclusion made an integral part of the work of the European Regional Development Fund?



Chapter 5

Delivery and access

The Structural Funds are delivered mainly by national governments, their ministries, departments and agencies. Non-Governmental Organizations concerned with social exclusion have argued that who delivers the Structural Funds and how is important if the Funds are to reach those most at risk of poverty. If the Funds are to reach the most excluded, they must be delivered through people and agencies working closely with marginalized communities.

EAPN believes that non-governmental organizations can play an important role in the delivery of the Structural Funds. NGOs working with the poor and excluded can run projects and programmes in a manner both sympathetic and relevant to the needs and aspirations of excluded groups and communities. For these reasons, it is important that NGOs have access to the Structural Funds. Although the Structural Funds are built around government-led priorities and investment decisions, there should also be a role for NGOs. There is no rule which says that government and its agencies must deliver all parts of the Structural Funds. In the past, NGOs played an important role in the Community Initiative Programmes and almost all EQUAL projects were delivered by NGOs. Where NGOs can access the Structural Funds, for what purpose and how are therefore important questions.

5.1

ACCESS AND DELIVERY: WHO? WHAT? WHERE? HOW?

The Structural Fund regulation has remarkably little to say about who should deliver the Structural Funds. Implementation of the Funds is defined as the responsibility of the member state. They are to be distributed by managing authorities, which are defined as public or private bodies at national, regional or local levels designated by the member state, or the member state itself.

The Structural Funds for 2007 - 2013 are drafted in such a way as to facilitate an involvement of non-governmental organizations to deliver relevant programmes to excluded groups and communities, at least in certain ways. The European Social Fund has scope to fund active labour market measures, projects for equal opportunities, activities in the areas of training, education and lifelong learning, local employment initiatives and the information society. Eligible activities include pathways to labour market integration covering education and vocational training, the social economy and accompanying measures in the areas of care services and socio-educational development. Under the draft regulation for 2007-13, the European Social Fund states, as an objective, the need to promote social inclusion and measures for education, training and equality between men and women. Specifically:

- The managing authority of each operational programme shall encourage adequate participation and access of non-governmental organizations to the funded activities, notably in the domain of social inclusion and equality between women and men.
- 2% of the ESF must be allocated to capacity building and activities jointly undertaken by the social partners in the convergence objective areas;

There is provision for the strengthening of public administration so that it may support socio-economic actors, including social partners and relevant non-governmental organizations.

The scope of the draft European Social Fund regulation covers human resources including low skilled and older workers; labour market measures; activities to promote gender equality; specific action to strengthen the social integration of migrants, education and training and:

“Reinforcing social inclusion of people at a disadvantage and combating discrimination in particular by promoting:

- pathways to integration in employment for disadvantaged people, people experiencing social exclusion, early school leavers, minorities and people with disabilities through employability measures, including in the field of the social economy, accompanying actions and relevant social support services;
- diversity in the workplace and the combat against discrimination in accessing the labour market through awareness-raising and the involvement of local communities and enterprises.”

The regulation for the European Regional Development Fund makes possible investment not only in employment and infrastructure but also in local and employment development infrastructure and for structures providing neighbourhood services. The draft regulation for the European Regional Development Fund for 2007-2013 provides for investment in productive investment, infrastructure and other development initiatives including local development funds, neighbourhood services and the exchange of experiences between regions, towns and relevant social, economic and environmental actors. Measures for social inclusion may be funded in the cooperation objective areas. In projects for urban development, the fund may support ‘local employment and community development, as well as the provision of services to the population taking account of changing demographic structures’.

In practice, the managing authorities are normally identified in the appropriate Community Support Frameworks, Single Programming Documents and Operational Programme documents. Further delivery agencies are identified in individual sub-programmes, measures and subordinate actions. There is therefore ample scope for NGOs to access the Structural Funds for enlightened social objectives and purposes.

5.2

ACCESS AND DELIVERY: GLOBAL GRANTS

The current regulation makes provision for the Funds to be distributed by a global grant. Here, a grant is given to an intermediary body or agency with the necessary management skills, operating uniquely in the region concerned, with experience of the relevant field of work. It must operate in the public interest ‘and adequately involve the socio-economic interests directly affected by the implementation of the planned measures’. They can be local authorities, regional development bodies or non-governmental organizations, used preferably to assist local development initiatives. The use of a global grant requires the approval of the member state.

The global grant approach has considerable potential to bring the Structural Funds to groups and communities experiencing poverty. Intermediary bodies which have an understanding of social exclusion can be ideally placed to deliver Structural Funds, often in the form of small grants, to groups working in the area of community development and make a real impact at the local level. Intermediary funding bodies were used, with great success, to deliver the two Peace programmes in both parts of Ireland.

Despite their potential and proven track record where they have operated, global grants have been remarkably little used in the Structural Funds and Member States have been extraordinarily cautious in using the mechanism. The draft regulation for 2007-2013 empowers Member States to entrust the management and implementation of a part of an operational programme to one or more intermediate bodies. It also encourages Member States to use global grants for urban projects. The draft European Social Fund regulation says: ‘Support in the framework of a programme may be provided through global grants’.

Examples of global grant programmes, 2000-6

Czech Republic: NROS Foundation

Spain: Luis Vives Foundation

England: Greater London Enterprise ESF global grants programme

> See Greater London Enterprise : *Fast forward grants - report on the London ESF global grants programme Fast Forward grants 2002-3*. Greater London Enterprise, 28 Park st, London SE1 9EQ, tel 00.44.207.403.0300, mail@gle.co.uk, www.gle.co.uk

5.3

SOCIAL INCLUSION NGOS, DELIVERY AND ACCESS

The Structural Funds in Belgium are delivered by government agencies, not by NGOs. Essentially, the Structural Funds are available only for projects dealing with the minimum wage and not for broader aspects of social exclusion, even though many NGOs carry out training work. Those that do obtain ESF projects do so through projects for the equality of women. Even then, they are greatly handicapped by the lateness of payment and they must have a strong structure to survive such delays.

In Cyprus, Structural Funds are delivered by government under the authority of the planning bureau. They are not open to NGOs for the 2004-6 period, for it was decided that in the interests of speed, only government agencies should access the Funds.

With one exception, only state or regional public administration delivers the Structural Funds in the Czech Republic. The NROS Foundation is the only non-governmental delivery agency to deliver the Funds and this is done through a global grant for social inclusion projects and services for small and medium-size NGOs. NGOs are able to access the Structural Funds for social inclusion through this NROS global grant programme. There are two main barriers to their doing so successfully: financial and managerial inexperience; and the over-complicated system of administration involved in using the Funds.

Danish Structural Funds are delivered by national and regional government. NGOs can access the Danish Structural Funds through global grants. Using the European Social Fund is difficult for smaller NGOs because of the financial conditions, requirements for co-funding and the need for credit. Despite this, positive outcomes have been achieved and 'many fine projects have changed the lives' of excluded people.

The Structural Funds in Germany are delivered by federal and state government and government agencies, not by either independent agencies or NGOs. Global grants are not used. NGOs have a long, recognized experience of accessing the Structural Funds for labour market programmes. Although they are a reliable source of funding, the Structural Funds present problems of co-funding and pre-financing. There is a requirement for high turnover into employment and for more and more target groups, with projects not achieving the benchmark rate being required to pay back funding.

Spanish Structural Funds are delivered by the Ministry of Agriculture (LEADER), the Ministry of the Economy and Finance (ERDF) and the European Social Fund Administrative Unit (*Unidad Administradora del Fondo Social Europeo*, UAFSE) (ESF) in cooperation with the autonomous regional governments. For NGOs, the most accessible parts of the Structural Funds are the EQUAL programme and the operational programme for combatting discrimination, with some access to LEADER and INTERREG. The anti - discrimination programme is jointly managed by several ministries and prominent NGOs (Caritas, Red Cross, General Secretariat for Gypsies, Diagrama Foundation, ONCE Foundation, Luis Vives Foundation). The Luis Vives Foundation manages a global grant which provides a system of financial support for NGOs for networking and quality management. Otherwise, because of their complexity, access to the Structural Funds remains difficult for small NGOs and those without a strong administrative structure.

Estonian Structural Funds are delivered by government. So far, NGOs do not appear to have had sufficient access to the Structural Fund projects and there has been only one call for proposals in the area of children. It is extremely difficult for NGOs to respond to calls for projects, for many are asked for 20% to 50% of co-financing, more than what the European rules require and much more than what small NGOs can find. Many proposals for projects are made by government and local authorities who employ professional proposal writers: NGOs do not have the money to compete with this and must make proposals in the course of their ordinary work. Their ideas may be good, but they may not be as well presented. Government is still distrustful of NGOs, even though they have better access to the target groups. Proposals are rejected, government working only with partners with whom they have been in business before.

The Structural Funds in Hungary are delivered through government ministries, with ministries being involved in several programmes. NGOs are not involved in Structural Fund delivery and the government appears to know nothing about global grants. In theory, NGOs can access the Structural Funds, but this is difficult for small and young NGOs, which in reality must work in partnership with larger bodies e.g. a strong NGO or local government. On the financial front, participation is an unequal struggle, for NGOs must find co-financing and then the Structural Fund money comes in two or three months later than it should and in the meantime they can go bankrupt. Worse, managing authorities sometimes set down new conditions for NGOs after a project has been agreed. Not only NGOs but other social partners are affected by such bad management.

Where do NGOs access the Structural Funds?

Structural Funds generally accessible by NGOs

- Britain
- Portugal
- Italy
- Germany
- Denmark

Structural Funds with limited or difficult access by NGOs

- Belgium
- Estonia
- Lithuania
- Malta (EQUAL)
- Ireland (EQUAL, Peace)
- Poland
- Hungary
- Czech Rep (through global grant programme)
- Spain

Structural Funds not accessible by NGOs

- Cyprus

NGOs do have access to the Structural Funds in Ireland for social inclusion. The main points of access have been the EQUAL programme and the Peace programme, which have directly funded NGOs to fight poverty. The Structural Funds have been helpful in innovation and in developing the community sector but there is too much emphasis on projects being 'innovative' at the expense of longer-term development and fewer small grants appear to be available now.

The Structural Funds in Italy are delivered by national ministries and regional governments. Some independent national agencies carry out technical assistance tasks and some NGOs have participated in special initiatives through lump subsidies for projects for the integration of disadvantaged groups in the labour market.

NGOs are most likely to be involved in projects where the more advanced municipal, provincial or regional authorities develop systemic projects bringing together health, social, economic, training, cultural and rights-based issues. The situation for Italian NGOs has improved in recent years and many have now been involved in projects for services, vocational training and integration into the labour market, developing innovative models of education, training, new enterprises, the exercise of rights and the fight against exclusion. Eligibility has widened. A broader range of bodies has access to the Funds. Projects are more participative, there is less dependence on experts familiar with procedures and national and local government have been much better with advertising calls for proposals on the internet. The complexity of planning and reporting procedures still makes the Funds difficult for small NGOs.

Although the Structural Funds in Poland are delivered by government and not by NGOs or independent agencies, social inclusion NGOs can access the Funds there. So far though, such access has been difficult, as the capacity of social inclusion NGOs is limited, Structural Funds require a high level of prior knowledge and participation demands high levels of financial management, planning, implementation and evaluation skills.

The Structural Funds in Lithuania are delivered by the national government, NGOs are not involved and there is no system of global grants. Lithuanian NGOs can access the Structural Funds but to do so is very complicated and allocations are believed to be made along political lines.

Access to the Structural Funds in the Netherlands is very difficult and the bureaucratic requirements are overwhelming for small NGOs concerned with social exclusion.

The Structural Funds in Portugal are delivered by government agencies (ERDF: General Directorate for Regional Development; ESF: Department of Affairs for the European Social Fund) and although permitted under Portuguese legislation, global grants are not used. Portuguese NGOs may apply for projects, especially those financed by the European Social Fund. There are three problem areas. First, they must become accredited training bodies recognized by the Institute for Quality in Training (IQF). Second, the period waiting for approval is inordinately long, much longer than permitted in regulations. Third, although domestic regulations permit multi-annual funding, in practice NGOs received funding for only a year at a time. NGOs can access the Structural Funds, but they are not easy because of the poor standard of management of the Funds, slowness in decision-making, rigid administrative procedures, requirements for matching Funds and slowness in payments.

The Structural Funds in Britain are delivered by government, government agencies, independent agencies and NGOs. With the active support of government, global grants are used. NGOs deliver between 15% and 55% of the European Social Fund and a significant element of the European Regional Development Fund. The Funds can be accessed even by small NGOs, provided their programmes are linked to the labour market, albeit loosely in 'employability' initiatives. NGOs do best when they receive good technical assistance, but NGOs can still experience difficulties. Applications can be turned down for not being closely enough linked to the labour market. NGOs find application forms difficult, payment systems unfriendly and partnership requirements onerous. For some NGOs, participation in Structural Fund projects can be risky due to delayed payments and lead to the sudden contraction of the organization. Time schedules can be unrealistic and administration cumbersome, while projects sometimes must be redefined to suit the administrative requirements of the Funds. Despite these difficulties, NGOs have been able to access a steady stream of funding over the years and this has also helped them to obtain domestic funding.

Structural Funds in Malta are delivered by central government, though a wide range of bodies may propose projects. Global grants are not used. NGOs are in a position to apply to the Structural Funds, although they may face difficulties because of their lack of management experience and co-funding requirements. NGOs have participated as partners in the EQUAL programme.

5.4

CONCLUSIONS: DELIVERY AND ACCESS

The delivery and access of the Structural Funds by social NGOs remains a problem area. In only one country are the Structural Funds actually delivered in a significant way by NGOs: Britain. In two countries, global grants are used to assist NGOs (NROS in the Czech Republic, Luis Vives Foundation in Spain).

Access to the Structural Funds can be achieved elsewhere with varying degree of difficulty. It seems that social inclusion NGOs may apply to quite a restricted band of programmes. A second obstacle is the limiting of projects to a narrow concept of the labour market and social fund requirements, which may be applied more strictly than the regulations merit. This may rule out many social inclusion NGOs from applying and some even after they have. Once NGOs have managed to access the Funds, then a further set of difficulties come into play in the financial and administrative area (panel). These reduce the ability of NGOs to play an effective role in the Structural Funds and ultimately diminish the Funds themselves. This point is brought home where NGOs have managed to successfully access the Funds, for here they report that 'fine projects have changed the lives of many' (Denmark).

Global grants continue to be grossly underused. Britain and the Czech Republic show that global grants can be an effective way to deliver the Structural Funds and it is astonishing that considering their success record they are not used in all Member States by now. Global grants are especially suitable for small NGOs and this is important, for many of the NGOs that work most effectively in the social inclusion area are quite small.

Structural Funds: making it difficult

NGOs continue to report serious administrative barriers to their participation in Structural Fund programmes. These are:

- X Nature of co-funding requirements
- X Application of rules around labour market
- X Rules changed after projects signed
- X Requirements for accreditation to do training
- X Long wait for approval
- X Funding for only a year at a time
- X Bad management by managing authorities
- X Late payments
- X Unfriendly to small NGOs

5.5

CHECKLIST

- ✓ How does the next Structural Fund programming period aim to make the Structural Funds accessible and friendly to social inclusion NGOs? Does the National Development Plan or National Strategic Reference Framework give proper attention to the issue of delivery and access?
- ✓ Are the issues of delivery and access raised during the stage of planning and design? Do NGOs make the case for an enlightened system of delivery and access that will promote social inclusion?
- ✓ Is provision made for NGOs to deliver the Structural Funds as intermediary bodies?
- ✓ Is provision made for global grants?
- ✓ Are NGOs aware of the real difficulties that arise in accessing and subsequently running structural fund projects? Are they worth it? Is it sometimes better not to apply?
- ✓ Is the bad management of the Structural Funds of the type reported here documented and brought to the attention of the national and regional authorities? Is maladministration reported to the ombudsman or other institutions of redress?



Chapter 6

Monitoring: structures, indicators and knowledge

Monitoring is an important element of the Structural Funds. Monitoring is essential for efficient management, to ensure that money is spent for the purposes for which it is prescribed and to obtain the intended results. Monitoring is a continuous process which follows the Structural Funds in real time. The effectiveness of monitoring depends on who monitors, what information is collected and how the knowledge arising is put to use. Here, indicators are important, for they are used to test the progress of the Structural Funds in achieving their objectives. Indicators must be useful, informative and proportionate to the effort required to collect them and, in this case, must give us useful knowledge about social inclusion.

Key questions here are whether the Structural Funds note the progress of the Funds in promoting social inclusion and whether NGOs are involved in the monitoring and evaluation processes. Under the partnership principle, they should expect to be involved and the monitoring committees give them an opportunity to follow the Structural Funds up close. This chapter outlines the monitoring systems, the experience of NGOs involved, the knowledge gained and their future involvement.

6.1

MONITORING - DUTIES, RESPONSIBILITIES, ROLE

Under the regulations, managing bodies are formally responsible for the efficiency and correctness of the monitoring and evaluation systems. Managing bodies must set up financial and statistical monitoring systems, send annual reports (called annual implementation reports) to the Commission and ensure compliance with European Union policies. The regulation specifies that there be a monitoring committee for each Community Support Framework, Single Programming Document and operational programme. Monitoring committees must be set up by the member state in consultation with the partners and must promote the balanced participation of men and women. The role of the monitoring committees is to:

- Confirm and adjust the Programme Complement
(> Chapter 1: *How the Structural Funds work*).
- Decide on the criteria for projects.
- Review progress, examine the results of implementation and the achievement of targets, consider and approve annual reports.
- Make changes in financial allocations, with the approval of the managing authority.

Managing authorities and monitoring committees are expected to set down physical and financial indicators, using methods published by the Commission. These indicators must relate to the assistance concerned and the socio-economic, structural and environmental situation in the state concerned. They must set specific targets and statistics must be broken down by gender. Annual monitoring reports must cover socio-economic trends and national policy changes, with details of progress achieved.

Typically, monitoring committees comprise representatives of national governments, ministries, departments and the regional authorities; the European Commission; and employer, farmer and trade union representatives. Monitoring committees generally meet in day-long sessions twice a year. A few have sub-committees to progress business between meetings. Some committees are quite large, with 40 or 50 members. For 2007-2013, the Commission has indicated that it will supervise the monitoring process less directly. Although Commission officials will have the right to attend meetings, they may attend less frequently than in the past.

Monitoring: draft general regulation 2007-2013

1. The managing authority and the monitoring committee shall ensure the quality of the implementation of the operational programme.
2. The managing authority and the monitoring committee shall carry out monitoring by reference to financial indicators and indicators of implementation, results and impact specified in the operational programme. Where the nature of the assistance permits, the statistics shall be broken down by sex and by the size of the recipient undertakings.

Evaluation is an important aspect of any programme or project. The two key questions are: Does the evaluation process of the Structural Funds address issues of social inclusion? Second, are NGOs involved or consulted in the evaluation process?

Evaluation is a broader, deeper process than monitoring, for it analyzes the operation of the Funds at three distinct points in each programming period: before, during and after. The Commission terms for the before, during and after are *ex-ante*, mid-term and *ex-post* evaluations.

The *ex-ante* evaluation is intended to be the basis for the preparation of the development plan and is expected to analyze the situation in the member state, the socio-economic situation, the environmental background and the situation of men and women. An important objective is to ensure consistency between Community objectives and intended actions at national level. Of the three types of evaluation, this tends to be the shortest.

The mid-term evaluation is expected to look at the initial results of the programming period, the extent to which targets have been attained and to recommend changes in allocations for the rest of the programming period in the light of changed circumstances. This is probably the most important evaluation of the three.

The *ex-post* evaluation takes place after the end of the programming period and looks at achievements, results and impact, coming to conclusions about economic and social cohesion. It must be completed within three years of the end of the programming period. Generally, it does not become available until so far into the new programming period that its relevance can be diminished.

Evaluation is designed to test whether the Funds are achieving their stated objectives, whether they strengthen economic and social cohesion and their impact on the priorities set in each country. Results must be made publicly available. Generally, national evaluations are organized by the member state and the managing authority. In the case of the mid-term evaluation, this normally goes through the CSF or SPD monitoring committee. Individual monitoring committees are normally responsible for organizing evaluations of individual operational programmes. The draft Structural Fund general regulation for 2007-2013 suggests that evaluation should be 'strategic in nature in order to examine the evolution of a programme or group of programmes' - giving plenty of scope for themes such as social exclusion to be considered.

Traditionally, NGOs have been little involved or consulted in the evaluation process. Where NGOs are members of monitoring committees, they have the opportunity to comment on the process for selecting

evaluators, their terms of reference and on the subsequent evaluation reports. This can be important, for the terms of reference for the evaluators are crucial in determining the type of report that is done. Here, NGOs can press for the evaluation to give proper attention to the social impact of the Funds and ensuring that the impact on social inclusion of the programme in question is given due weight.

6.2
SOCIAL INCLUSION NGOs, MONITORING AND EVALUATION

NGOs are not involved in monitoring the Structural Funds in Belgium. In Cyprus, NGOs find it very difficult to get information about the effectiveness of the Structural Funds in combating social exclusion or otherwise. The monitoring committees for the Structural Funds in Cyprus are selected by the Planning Bureau and are related to the projects to be financed: employers, trade unions, environmentalists are included. In Hungary, four social inclusion NGOs are members of the human resource development operational programme. The Structural Funds in Denmark are overseen by the National Control Committee, the *Overågningssudvalget*. NGOs do not participate but through the Council of Socially Marginalized People, they are represented on the social fund monitoring committee by the Ministry of Social Affairs.

Involving the NGOs in monitoring	
Social inclusion NGOs not involved in monitoring committees	Where social inclusion NGOs are involved
Belgium	Czech Republic
Estonia	Germany
Lithuania	Hungary
Cyprus	Ireland
Denmark	Poland
	Britain
	Spain

In the Czech Republic, each operational programme has a monitoring committee. NGOs are involved but they generally have only two seats out of 40 or 50. The network of social NGOs participates on the operational programme for human resources development while women's NGOs participate on the EQUAL monitoring committee and that of the Single Programming Document for Prague. Sectoral NGO networks participate in the other operational programme monitoring committees, with regional NGO associations on the INTERREG committee. They were selected through an open and transparent competition with predetermined criteria, the final decision confirmed by the Government Council for NGOs. In practice, the work of the monitoring committees is formal and technical and they are under the strong guiding hand of managing authorities and ministries, who hold more than 50% of the seats. Open debates are rare and if there is a vote, the ministries always insist on their position and since they have a majority, the outcome is known in advance. NGOs raising concerns are immediately silenced by the ministries.

Germany has federal and regional (*Land*) monitoring committees that meet twice a year. Following a campaign for participation, regional and national (but not grass roots) NGOs were invited by national and *Länder* ministries to join the committees. The committees are useful points of contact with fund managers and in getting information. Monitoring and evaluation are evident in annual reports, but their effectiveness is questionable. The government defines and decides in many ways what is 'successful' or not. And despite its critics, the European Social Fund can improve the situation of marginalized people. Although it is a restricted approach to social exclusion, it is one approach.

Six NGOs are represented on the EQUAL monitoring committee in Spain (the Association of Moroccan Immigrant Workers, General Secretariat for Gypsies, Spanish Committee of the Handicapped, Progressive

Women's Federation, Platform of Social NGOs, National Council of Social Action NGOs). Apart from that, NGOs are little involved and they are not on any of the monitoring committees of the autonomous regional governments. Evaluations are normally put out to external tender and are generally done by universities and consultancies, the EQUAL evaluation being published on the internet and publicly presented. EQUAL was monitored very efficiently through the use of technical assistance. Otherwise, evaluation has tended to be quantitative rather than qualitative. The impact of the Structural Funds on social exclusion is measured only indirectly. For example, there are indicators to measure the numbers of immigrants and members of ethnic minorities who find employment, people who have new professional or vocational qualifications, and new self-employment initiatives.

In Ireland, there are monitoring committees for each of the thematic and regional monitoring committees. The committees are important for access to officials but not for decisions, accountability or effectiveness - NGOs find that they rubber stamp decisions already made and are not properly consultative. Social NGOs were given at least one position on the monitoring committee of each of the operational programmes, the horizontal coordinating committees and the Community Initiatives and two on the overall National Development Plan/Community Support Framework monitoring committee. Social NGOs not endorsing the national partnership agreement with government were expelled from some committees. NGO representatives do not have enough training and resources, so EAPN Ireland and another Irish national network, the Community Workers Co-operative, organized for the community and voluntary representatives on the monitoring committees to come together collectively for training and to identify and address issues arising from their participation. For evaluations, Ireland has a national evaluation unit and large-scale independent reviews for the different operational programmes - but evaluators seem to have limited openness to users on the ground.

In Italy, the monitoring committees (*comitati di sorveglianza*) comprise technical experts from government ministries and the regions. The committees are highly formal, meet rarely and have little local contact. Recently, some local communities and NGOs have been invited to express their views to them. The indicators used for the Structural Funds are mainly administrative and financial, with less frequent use of qualitative measures, for example with projects for disadvantaged people. There are good qualitative indicators in

Value of monitoring committees

On monitoring committees you can get the information you want, talk directly to the Commission, ask questions - sometimes again and again. You can get a better picture and pass information on to other NGOs.

- Germany

On the effectiveness of indicators and monitoring

The governments define to what extent their policy had prevented social exclusion. Even that a national labour market policy with a forced labour element combats exclusion by bringing people back into the labour market. This will be put in the annual report and passed by the European Commission. NGOs may protest, but there is no chance of changing it.

- Germany

Monitoring: not quite democratic

In practice, the work of the monitoring committees is formal and technical and they are under the strong guiding hand of managing authorities and ministries, who hold more than 50% of the seats. Open debates are rare and if there is a vote, the ministries always press their position and since they have a majority, the outcome is known in advance. NGOs raising concerns are immediately silenced by the ministries.

- Czech Republic

the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion but the lack of a link between them and the Structural Funds is a real weakness.

In Estonia, a few NGOs participate in monitoring committees and they do not include social NGOs. The quality of monitoring is very poor and those NGOs who are present do not understand their role there. NGOs are not involved in Structural Fund monitoring committees in Lithuania.

One main programme in Portugal, the POEFDS programme, is concerned with social exclusion, as is the EQUAL Community Initiative Programme. But there is no system for evaluating the overall impact of the Structural Funds on poverty and social exclusion. The evaluation of the implementation of the Structural Funds does not concern itself with social exclusion. Portugal has, in addition to the CSF monitoring committee, a CSF supervisor (a government official) and a CSF observatory. The observatory holds seminars and commissions reports.

NGOs, including social NGOs, are very much involved in the Structural Funds monitoring committees in Britain. Indeed, the experience of NGOs on the monitoring committees is often longer in duration and broader than government personnel, whose turnover is high, to the extent that NGOs are sometimes asked to provide training for the government members. In Britain, programme monitoring is around cross-cutting themes (e.g. equal opportunities, local benefit, innovation and sustainable development) but there is still too much emphasis on just spending the money.

Democracy, NGOs and monitoring committees in Poland

In 2004, after a campaign by NGOs on the partnership principle, the government invited NGOs to fill places on the Structural Fund monitoring committees in Poland. The Polish NGO office then proceeded to:

- Invite NGOs to nominate candidates (one male, one female) who they consider to have the appropriate qualifications;
- The candidates were then voted on by all NGOs;
- The highest candidates were then presented to the ministry for ratification.

The nominations and elections were carried out over the internet. Checks were made to ensure that only valid votes were cast. This system ensured an open, transparent, democratic procedure. The elected representatives had a democratic legitimacy and were answerable for their mandates. The problems associated with government choosing NGO representatives were avoided.

Horizontal coordinating committees in Ireland

The Structural Funds in Ireland for 2000-6 have thematic horizontal monitoring committees in addition to the operational programme monitoring committees. These ensure that specific themes are monitored across all the Structural Funds. The horizontal coordinating committees cover rural development, the environment; equality and social inclusion. The visibility of these issues within the Structural Funds is raised as a result.

Social NGOs do their own evaluation in Ireland

To coincide with the mid-term review of the National Development Plan/Community Support Framework EAPN Ireland, in cooperation with a range of community and voluntary organizations with a focus on combating poverty and social exclusion, carried out research to look at the experience of local and national community and voluntary organizations of the programme. The objectives were to raise awareness of the review process, to provide these organizations with an opportunity to influence the review itself and the remainder of the programme and to inform the next round of Structural Funds after 2006.

Malta has one monitoring committee for the Single Programming Document and one for EQUAL and NGOs are represented through the Malta Council for Economic and Social Development. They include NGOs concerned with equal opportunities, the environment, farming and fishing, though they do not appear to have social inclusion NGOs. Projects are required to provide quarterly reports and a Structural Funds database records progress in meeting the targets of the programme. The progress of the Structural Funds in combating social exclusion is recorded in detail in the annual implementation reports.

For the Banques Alimentaires, food distribution is monitored through recording the statistics of the tonnages of products distributed e.g. cereal, rice, butter, powdered milk.

6.3

CONCLUSIONS ON SOCIAL INCLUSION NGOs, MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The pattern of involvement of social inclusion NGOs on Structural Fund monitoring committees is uneven, reflecting the still inadequate working out of the partnership principle. Social inclusion NGOs are involved in monitoring committees in about half the Member States, but not involved in the other half. Granted the importance of social inclusion and bearing in mind the partnership principle, the failure of half the Member States to involve social inclusion NGOs is unacceptable.

Even where social inclusion NGOs are involved, monitoring committees are problematical. The Czech Republic shows how ministries dominate the committees and give little space to critical opinion and this pattern is reported from other states, such as Germany. Monitoring committees are formal, meet infrequently and focus on financial reporting. There is little place for addressing strategic issues, such as social inclusion, in a systematic way. The main value is in providing an opportunity to access government officials, as the Irish report illustrates.

Social inclusion NGOs appear to be little involved in evaluation processes and they seem to be quite remote from them. Evaluation does not seem to prioritize social inclusion, nor connect to the issues or groups around social inclusion, reporting instead on the formal progress of the Funds in reaching their financial targets. Several countries (e.g. Italy) commented on the failure to link the evaluation of the Structural Funds to the indicators already drawn up around the national action plans for social inclusion - a pity, granted that work has already gone into the area and that the Funds should coordinate European Union policies.



6.4

CHECKLIST

General

- ✓ Are NGOs on monitoring committees?
- ✓ Do you know the members of monitoring committees and are you in contact with them?
Do they hear the NGO perspective? Do you get the annual reports? Do the monitoring committees operate openly? (e.g. post their reports on the internet?)
- ✓ If NGOs are refused participation on monitoring committees, is this protested and brought to the attention of national government and the European Commission?

Where NGOs are on monitoring committees

- ✓ Do NGO representatives receive training, support and assistance?
- ✓ Do the committees use indicators that report on social inclusion? Is a good knowledge gained about the impact of the Funds on social inclusion?
- ✓ Is there gender balance on the committee?

On evaluation

- ✓ Do you have the evaluation reports of the present and previous programming periods?
- ✓ Do you make sure you are consulted about the evaluation process?
- ✓ Do you find out who are the evaluators? Do you meet with and present your views to the evaluators?
- ✓ Do the evaluations:
 - ✓ Give adequate attention to social inclusion?
 - ✓ Measure the impact of the Funds on poverty and social exclusion?
- ✓ Do you comment on the evaluations when they are published?



Chapter 7

Technical assistance

Technical assistance sounds like a dull technical issue - but it's not. Technical assistance has a potentially important role in the Structural Funds. It is designed to cover studies concerning the operation of the Funds, the exchange of information and experience, reaching out to final beneficiaries (essential for social inclusion), evaluation and computerized information systems. Using technical assistance intelligently can make all the difference in the quality of management of the Funds - 'good governance'.

In practice, Member States tend to absorb technical assistance budgets into internal management, the costs of monitoring committee meetings, publicity materials, posters and signage. Few Member States spend technical assistance on studies, reaching out to final beneficiaries or the exchange of information or experience. An additional problem is that it can be very difficult to find out where technical assistance is actually spent or even who takes those decisions.

7.1

THE USE OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

There is no good reason why technical assistance cannot be used creatively - for example to fund studies on the relationship between the Funds and social exclusion; to provide better links between the Funds and non-governmental organizations; to reach out to the most excluded groups or communities; to resource, train and support the participation of NGOs or their representatives. In Britain, the technical assistance budget has been used to fund the involvement of non-governmental organizations in the Structural Funds to promote social inclusion. Technical assistance has funded umbrella bodies to provide information, advice, support and training services so that NGOs can access and deliver Structural Fund programmes.

The key

Technical assistance has been the key to opening up the Structural Funds.
- Britain

The draft general regulation for 2007-2013 specifies that technical assistance may finance preparatory, monitoring, administrative and technical support, evaluation, audit and inspection measures. Specifically, it may support:

- Studies linked to the drawing up of the strategic guidelines;
- Evaluations, expert reports, statistics and studies;
- Measures aimed at the partners, the beneficiaries of assistance from the Funds and the general public including information awareness;
- Measures to disseminate information, networking, raise awareness, promote cooperation and exchange experiences throughout the Union;
- Installation, operation and interconnection of computerized systems for management, monitoring, inspection and evaluation;
- Improvements in evaluation methods and exchange of information on practices.

Granted that 'the beneficiaries of assistance from the Funds' may be socially excluded people, technical assistance is an important question. For 2007-2013, Member States may spend up to 4% of each operational programme on technical assistance for the convergence and competitiveness objectives; and up to 6% on the cooperation objective.

The draft Community Strategic Guidelines lay emphasis on the importance of good governance of the Funds. They state that Member States should ensure that the need to increase efficiency and transparency is addressed. In particular they should consider action to enhance capacity building, in such areas as social audit procedures, open government principles and support to key services and socio-economic actors (4.3.4). Between them, the regulations and the guidelines express the need for the Funds to be used both for ensuring good governance in social policy and in assisting the governance role of non-governmental and civil society organizations.

7.2

SOCIAL INCLUSION NGOs AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

NGOs do not benefit from technical assistance in Belgium. The ESF unit is the main beneficiary. This is also the case in Estonia.

In the Czech Republic, technical assistance is limited to the state authorities and NGOs do not benefit. Technical assistance is used to fund promotional material like bags, mugs, souvenirs, public relations and advertising contracted to external agencies, as well as some training. In Denmark, only the public authorities benefit from technical assistance, not NGOs. It is the same in Germany: 'No way for us'.

Bags, mugs, souvenirs, public relations and advertising

In Spain, the administrative unit responsible for the Structural Funds provides technical assistance to individual NGOs in the operational programme for combatting discrimination and this has proved to be very useful. Subsidies are available to facilitate access by NGOs to the regional programmes run by the autonomous regional governments and in the operational programme for the promotion of employment.

In Italy, technical assistance goes to the ISFOL institute (*Istituto per lo sviluppo della formazione professionale dei laboratori*, Institute for the Development of Workers Vocational Training) and from time to time other technical bodies provide technical assistance in the form of accounting, administration and reporting and NGOs benefit from this activity. Technical assistance in Portugal is open to all beneficiary organizations, including NGOs. Likewise in Malta, technical assistance is provided for the managing authority and intermediate bodies and NGOs are eligible to benefit.

In Britain, NGOs benefit from a high level of technical assistance for training and information activities. Significant publicity grants are given to NGOs from technical assistance budgets to publicize the Structural Funds through regional training networks.

Getting around the technical assistance problem in Poland

All the technical assistance in Poland went into government ministries and agencies. A number of Polish private funders decided to find ways of providing something like a technical assistance programme for Polish NGOs, but through other means, such as the establishment of a Polish NGO office in Brussels and training programmes. The Stefan Batory Foundation provided assistance for the holding of conferences on the Structural Funds in each of Poland's 16 *voivodships* (regions), with the appointment and subsequent training of two experts from each region, with sectoral experts in the areas of environment and agriculture. These experts then served as advisors to NGOs in each region and an interface between NGOs and the regional authorities. They provide information, advice on projects and news, relayed on from the Polish NGO office in Brussels.

7.3

CONCLUSIONS FOR NGOS AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

The limited use made of technical assistance is disappointing. Only one country, Britain, appears to appreciate the value of technical assistance and use it to its full potential. In several countries, technical assistance is available to NGOs in theory (e.g. Malta and Portugal), but there is no evidence that it has been so used. In most other countries, governments make it clear that, whatever the European regulation says, NGOs will not get technical assistance.

Despite this disheartening picture, the situation may change over time. In other areas of Structural Fund management, social inclusion NGOs have made progress over time, such as information, partnership and monitoring and this may eventually happen here. The Polish good practice example is an imaginative way of circumventing unenlightened governments and a model to inspire others. The Commission's emphasis on 'good governance' should strengthen their arguments.

7.4

CHECKLIST

- ✓ Do you know who decides on technical assistance in your country?
- ✓ Do you know where technical assistance has been spent up to now and for what?
- ✓ If the government spends all the technical assistance money on government agencies, has it been called to account for not using it more widely?
- ✓ Have you applied for technical assistance to resource the participation in the structural Funds of NGOs concerned with social exclusion? Is your government aware of how helpful technical assistance can be in promoting the involvement of social inclusion NGOs, as it has been in Britain? Is your government aware of the success of the British experience? Is it aware of the wide scope of the new regulation?
- ✓ But if you have not yet applied, have you thought of how to begin dialogue with your government on technical assistance? What kind of actions would it be helpful for technical assistance to fund in the area of promoting social inclusion?
- ✓ If your government says no, do you have a strategy to persuade it to reconsider?

Some tips for influencing the Structural Funds

- ✓ Get, read the information and know the key texts you need, (e.g. regulations, guidelines, national strategic reference frameworks, operational programmes)
- ✓ Keep up to date through the national, European, EAPN, other websites
- ✓ Identify, contact, meet the key officials responsible in national ministries, European Commission (desk officers)
- ✓ Making social inclusion a priority in the Structural Funds is a political issue that national NGOs must largely resolve with their own government, at home, in their own member state
- ✓ Always try to influence proposals, plans, documents, reports at the earliest possible stage



