

**Social Inclusion NGOs' access to structural funds:
State of play and challenges for 2007-2013
Porto 27th September 2007**

SEMINAR REPORT

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Co-organised by the European Anti-Poverty Network and REAPN (EAPN Portugal), the seminar brought together NGO activists from Portugal and different EU countries as well as representatives from public authorities.

As Member States were still negotiating their strategic priorities (National Strategic Reference Frameworks and Operational Programmes) with the European Commission, it aimed in particular at examining the place given to social inclusion in the new programming period of structural funds, focusing more specifically on mechanisms that can support social NGOs' access to the funds.

Opening session

The first session was chaired by **Agostinho Jardim Moreira, President of EAPN Portugal**.

Agostinho Jardim Moreira presented the main features of poverty in Portugal and the role of structural funds in this regard. Creating the right opportunities and using the resources to tackle structural problems such as early school dropout, women poverty, in work poverty is crucial in Portugal. The Portuguese Anti-Poverty Network (REAPN) has worked to open the structural funds instruments to social inclusion NGOs and built their capacity through information, training and research, but also awareness-raising among public opinion. Portuguese NGOs are looking forward to learning from other models (such as that of Spain), and it is positive to see that for the first time global grants will be opened to NGOs in Portugal for 2007-2013.

Paula Santos (Coordination Commission of the Northern Region, Portugal), presented in particular the contribution from the European Regional Development Fund, which will be able to finance operations on social issues, such as urban rehabilitation, health (equipment for healthcare, integrated care), education (school centres). The programme is primarily focusing on competitiveness but some scope remains in the social area. Within the competences and tools available, the Coordination Commission will continue to ensure cohesion, and to fund NGO projects in the field of social policy.

Claudia Taylor East (EAPN Malta), Chair of the EAPN Structural Funds Task Force welcomed participants on behalf of EAPN. She presented the network and its achievement in advocating for the new programme period 2007-2013 and building the capacity of NGOs. In addition, she stressed the need for NGO to better access structural funds in the field of social inclusion, gender equality and equal opportunities, in the spirit of the "partnership principle" from structural funds general regulations (article 11).

1. Fighting poverty and exclusion through structural funds: priorities and challenges for 2007-2013

This session was devoted to assessing the main social inclusion elements of structural funds in the new programming period, from both a Portuguese and an EU perspective.

1.1. “How can the funds contribute to strengthening the Lisbon strategy’s social pillar?”

- http://eapn.horus.be/module/module_page/images/pdf/pdf_publication/Non-EAPN%20Publications/Lisbon%20strat.27.09.07.ppt

Manuel Laranja, Coordinator’s Office of the Lisbon Strategy and the Technological Plan (Portugal), insisted in particular on the funds’ contribution to accompanying social and economic change and their link with the Lisbon Strategy:

Cohesion vs competitiveness - The situation of Portugal considerably evolved since 2000-2006. The country gained more in terms of cohesion than in terms of competitiveness and is not anymore divided a by dichotomy between coastlines and inland, with some inland regions being quite developed. Key issues for both Portugal and the EU include globalization of markets, creating a knowledge-based economy, aging populations, immigration and sustainability of the social model (with employment as a key cohesion factor).

Facing a changing world: link with the Lisbon strategy – In 2005, the review of the Lisbon strategy took these aspects into account and led to the setting up of National Reform Programmes (NRPs). The Portuguese NRP entails 4 main objectives: credibility (consolidating public accounts, reduce public deficit by 2,8%), promoting confidence, assuming the challenges of competitiveness and reinforcing the social, territorial and environmental cohesion. The NRP (2005-2008) is organised around 7 policies and 125 measures (30 of them in the field of employment and social cohesion).

NSRF strategic priorities – Closely linked to the National Reform Programme, the Portuguese NSRF is articulating multiple priorities (2005-2008 PNACE). Its key priorities linked to social cohesion include promoting qualifications, sustainable growth, social cohesion (employment, qualifications, training and inclusion), better regulation. Its social pillar is estimated to amount to 19,2% of the total (through for example investment in social infrastructures, amounting to 9%, mobilizing change in employment and inclusion). Examples of measures in this framework include professional training, integration of disable people, of migrants, expansion of pre-school network, national reading plan, network of proximity services (health and social services).

1.2. “Social inclusion in the new programming period: a state of play”

Based on the planning documents of 8 EU countries, **Brian Harvey, Consultant for EAPN**, stressed common challenges but also divergences between EU member States.

- http://eapnhorus.b.e/module/module_page/images/pdf/pdf_publication/Non-EAPN%20Publications/Bryan%20Harvey.ppt

The 4th Cohesion report: going beyond GDP – It arises from the *4th Report on Economic and Social Cohesion in the EU* published in 2007 that a key question will be to improve structural funds’ ability to deliver on social as much as on regional cohesion. The European Parliament has clearly stated that cohesion needs to be measured by going beyond GDP: will the next reports to be published in 2009 and 2011 integrate this wider vision?

Divergences among Member States - So far only a minority of the NSRFs have been published in EU procedural languages (in particular EN or FR), which appears particularly problematic in terms of transparency and access to EU citizens. A presentation of the main features of 8 national NSRFs was made, focusing in particular on the priority given to inclusion (both in financial and strategic terms), main target groups, horizontal principles (EQUAL, sustainable development), equality, governance and partnership with NGOs, including financial aspects. It appears that plans vary in length, detail and rigorousness, with a lack of critical approach.

Which place for inclusion? Specific concerns emerge in relation to the priority given to inclusion. Very few mentions are made to the OMC on social inclusion, with reference to Lisbon setting aside its social pillar. There is also a lack of commitment to the social pillar in relation to the European Regional Development Fund. Besides, the principles and types of projects that EQUAL supported were not sufficiently integrated. There is also little sign of global grants and technical assistance to NGOs.

Ways forward – A major challenge will be to target those in charge drafting implementation programmes and raise awareness of issues that have been left aside, in particular social inclusion proofing, but also partnership with civil society or gender equality.

2. Ensuring a better access for NGOs

This session aimed at presenting mechanisms that can support NGOs in better accessing and managing structural funds, through specific financial mechanisms, information and training programmes.

2.1. The role of technical assistance in supporting access to European Social Fund

- http://eapn.horus.be/module/module_page/images/pdf/pdf_publication/Non-EAPN%20Publications/TA_PT_27.09.07.ppt

Humberto Sertório, Institute for the Management of the ESF presented the key features of the Portuguese Operational Programme on Technical Assistance (European Social Fund), that will address NGO information and capacity-building. The OP has not been not approved yet but will soon be found on: www.gren.pt.

Main features of the technical assistance programme – The Programme will be implemented by the Management Institute for the ESF, with two priority axis: one for convergence, and the other for the competitiveness area. Its main priorities are the following:

- Functioning of coordination, monitoring and management systems
- Audit
- Integrated information systems
- Information and communication,
- Studies and evaluations

A database will be created to disseminate information on structural funds programmes, to enhance general public information. Two studies were also undertaken to ensure coherence between actions supported by the ESF and other priorities, including the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, National Employment Plan, National Plan for Equality, National Plan for the Integration of People with Disabilities.

Typology of beneficiaries - Potential beneficiaries of the Technical assistance OP include: the Institute of the Management of the ESF, the Finance department (control and auditing), Ministerial and public bodies, Universities, social partners, civil society. NGOs will thus be able to benefit from it.

2.2. The importance of technical assistance: lobby and capacity building

- http://eapn.horus.be/module/module_page/images/pdf/pdf_publication/Non-EAPN%20Publications/TA_27.09.07.ppt

Ray Philips, EAPN UK, London Voluntary Sector Training Consortium, presented the experience of NGOs which were successful in using technical assistance funding, building upon the experience of EU countries such as the UK. A key issue for EAPN has been since its beginning to improve NGOs' capacity to approach structural funds, through in particular a Manual on the Management of structural funds, but also a pilot project set up on to deliver capacity-building on structural funds on a European scale.

Barriers to NGOs' participation – Some of the main obstacles faced by NGOs wishing to engage with structural funds include: lack of information, of resources in application rounds, nature of co-funding requirements, application of rules around labour-market, rules being changed after project are signed, requirements of accreditation to do training, long waiting period for approval.

Some good practices – Technical assistance can be used to enable projects to be better delivered throughout the whole cycle: it can support tools such as preparation and appraisals, studies, evaluations, partner support, information, computerised systems... Good practices have been put in place in a number of Member States, including Spain, Malta, Slovenia, United Kingdom. Slovenia taking up the UE presidency in 2008 will be key to translate some of the "talking into walking".

Holding officials accountable – Some key questions need to be asked to those in charge of technical assistance in Member States: who decides upon TA in the country? where has it been spent and on what? is it spent only by government agencies? have social inclusions NGOs been involved in delivering it?

A multi-level strategy – Ray Phillips finished by stressing that that using technical assistance as a tool to support NGOs' access requires concerted actions at different levels, and to mobilise both EU and national budgets.

3. Ensuring a better access for NGOs: good practices from across the EU

Building upon the presentations made during the previous session, representatives from different Member States reported on their own commitment at national and regional level.

3.1. Improving access to the funds through targeted technical assistance for NGOs (Malta)

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Claudia Taylor East (EAPN Malta, chair of the EAPN taskforce on structural funds) stressed the positive effect that exchange of good practices from other Member States had in Malta. Such exchange supported Maltese NGOs in developing better contacts with the managing authorities, and inspired them to run a training programme supporting Maltese NGOs.

Activities – The training project has been divided into two main phases. It started by a first meeting targeting NGOs, civil society organisations and local councils, to provide insight into the types of projects eligible under the new Operational Programme. It was followed by targeted modules, dealing with more specific aspects:

- financial management (delivered by accountancy firm);
- information on how to use the manual of procedure;
- project management, monitoring and control (particularly useful as it changed the perception and practices of NGOs in terms of project management);
- “ESF in practice” (with participation of various EAPN representatives);
- other structural funds schemes of interest to civil society organisations.

What is expected from the project? 20 organisations were trained and informed on structural funds, 4 of them mobilised to apply for and/manage SF project by mid-2008. At least one partnership was set up in applying for or implementing structural funds projects. At least one partnership was formed with a trans-national counterpart.

3.2. From technical assistance to capacity-building (Slovenia)

- http://eapn.horus.be/module/module_page/images/pdf/pdf_publication/Non-EAPN%20Publications/Slovenia_27.09.07.ppt

Robert Levicar (Slovenia, Agency for Development Initiatives) came back to the experience of Slovene NGOs who will now be able to access capacity-building through structural funds.

A project proposed by the third sector itself - Slovenia is marked by a lack of sectoral approach to NGOs and the need to reinforce the sector. NGOs thus decided to propose the programme “The Development of NGOs, civil dialogue and social dialogue in the period 2007-2013”, which aimed to provide support for networking at national and regional level. In particular, the proposal developed included:

- Employment in NGOs (with strong focus on young people and high-skilled people).
- Training of staff
- Support in NGO operations
- Development of financial resources
- Recognition of NGOs/voluntary sector in Slovenia (status, public relations, development of media)
- Establishment of civil dialogue (analysis on needs of NGOs, training for NGOs to get involved)

Impact on the Operational Programme - Some of the demands made by the sector were met in programming documents, in particular the qualification of NGOs as beneficiaries in all priorities of ESF and ERDF; an important amount of money for the NGO sector (7% of ESF OP); specific measures for NGOs and voluntary sector development (12 million €, together with trade unions). However, others did not impact, in particular on the possibility for NGOs to deliver technical assistance projects and their participation in programming committees.

3.3. Global grants and technical assistance

Spain - sharing experiences on 2000-2006 and perspectives for 2007-2013.

- http://eapn.horus.be/module/module_page/images/pdf/pdf_publication/Non-EAPN%20Publications/Spain_27.07.07.ppt

Rosalia Guintin (EAPN Spain) presented the main mechanisms which allowed NGOs to access structural funds in the last programming period, and changes that occurred for 2007-2013.

National Operational Programme on fighting discrimination – In the past programming period, Spain had a specific Operational Programme on Anti-Discrimination (run through EQUAL), which was a major step for NGOs' access to structural funds, allowing a better recognition of their role. The programme was implemented by a small number of NGOs acting as intermediary bodies, among which the Women's Institute and the Luis Vives Foundation. The Women's institute played an important role in introducing the transversality of equality between women and men, promoted woman's role in society, addressed topics of women in difficulties (Roma, migrants, other minorities).

Luis Vives' programme on NGO access – The Foundation was created in 1987 and put a strong focus on the reinforcement of the third sector, in particular in the field of social insertion. In the last programming period it acted as intermediary body managing part of the Anti-Discrimination OP through global grants. Activities of the Foundation with regard to capacity-building revolved around: qualification, networking, quality management, development of management tools, dissemination. In total, and since 2001, 214 out of the 1193 presented projects were adopted. Projects funded dealt in particular with women and migrants. More specifically, 17 training seminars were implemented together with EAPN Spain and Un Sol M6n, which provided information, training, working groups and consultations, publications, cooperation and networking.

New programming period – The Foundation will remain as an intermediary body in 2007-2013, yet with a smaller budget. It will be active in particular in the new interregional programme on the fight against discrimination, which should ensure a follow-up of the EQUAL programme and again put a strong focus on NGO participation. Yet there has been no confirmation of the use of global grants for this programme.

Hungary – advocating for a global grants programme

- http://eapn.horus.be/module/module_page/images/pdf/pdf_publication/Non-EAPN%20Publications/Hungary_27.09.07.ppt

Istvan Dande (EAPN Hungary) reported on the experience of Hungarian NGOs advocating for the setting up of a global grants facility. Established in 2004, EAPN Hungary brings together 80 members.

Learning from others – In developing a strategy around structural funds 2007-2013 the network was able to learn from EAPN and its members, in particular in terms of lobbying (act strategically and start early). The group made proposals around the negotiations of the Structural funds regulation and lobbied more specifically towards Hungarian MEPs.

The global grant system – Hungarian organizations were able to build on the experience of the 2004-2006 period, where NGOs had no financial background and were facing delays in payments. The EAPN March 2006 meeting in Budapest contributed to convince the State of the necessity to put in place a global grants programme, which was achieved for 2007-2013. Yet financial background is crucial for the success of a global grants system, as stressed by the evaluation of the ESF in London (importance of up front payment, without which most projects would not have happened).

Evaluation of NGO demands – Beyond global grants themselves, the campaign was successful in achieving a number of goals: a specific Operational Programme on Social Renewal, with a priority on social inclusion, local community development and civil society. Yet the role of NGOs as intermediary body still needs to be discussed. Besides, NGOs did not succeed yet in getting more advanced payments for projects.

4. Workshops

Building upon the examples presented during the day, participants were invited to discuss potential strategies in their own country.

Workshop 1 (EN, FR, PT) discussed in particular the difficulties faced in developing advocacy campaign on structural funds. The next six months will be crucial for NGOs to enter in dialogue with their government (with the adoption of the global grants programme in Portugal, for instance). Yet NGOs are often not enough organised, are too often leading isolated strategies. REAPN (EPAN Portugal) has been particularly engaged in networking activities, but finds difficulties to mobilize the sector, which is facing a leadership crisis. EAPN (Europe) has to be used as tool to approach with EU institutions and develop integrated strategies at EU level, but national organizations themselves need to better know EU level requirements and tools.

Workshop 2 (EN only) came out with proposals for next six months, insisting in particular on the need for awareness-raising. It also stressed that institutions should be accountable: “naming and shaming” might be an efficient strategy. Besides, NGOs should try to engage in cooperation to achieve poverty eradication, rather than compete with each others.