

**Minutes structural funds working group
14 June 2008, Paris**

Participants

Bruno René Bazin (European Organisations, Babelea), Claudia Taylor-East (Malta), Douhomir Minev (Bulgaria), Elga Zabarte (Latvia), Eugen Bierling-Wagner (Austria), Eva Karlsen (Norway), Farbod Khansari (Avisse), Fatima Veiga (Portugal), Frederic Vanhauwaert (Belgium), H.C. Laurberg (Denmark), Ibrahim Nouhoum (Slovenia), Inge Fäldt (Sweden), Istvan Dande (Hungary), Ilona Sniegonova (Czech Republic), Krzysztof Balon (Poland), Klaus Schneider (Luxembourg), Samuel le Floch (France), Paul Ginnell (Ireland), Reinhard Kühn (Germany), Rosalia Guntin (Spain), Ray Phillips (United Kingdom), Sigita Liateke (Lithuania), Brian Harvey (consultant), Elodie Fazi, Tanya Basarab (secretariat).

Chairs: Claudia Taylor East (morning), Ray Phillips (afternoon)

Minute takers: Tanya Basarab, Elodie Fazi

1. Introduction

1.1 Welcome

The Agenda and minutes of the last meetings were adopted.

1.2. Organisation of the working group

Following a proposal by the planning group, Claudia Taylor East was appointed chair of the structural funds working group.

Claudia Taylor East reminded the participants of the role of the planning group, which met on 14th March: guidance, representation (chairing meetings and representing the network), commitment.

1.3. Update on the technical assistance project

Ray Phillips presented the outcomes of the technical assistance project. The Commission came with a very negative answer and clearly stated that they do not want to provide EU level technical assistance for NGOs. EAPN is also following the project with the King Baudouin Foundation, which is checking if other organizations wish to join to support a hub. In addition, transnationality might be a lever to follow-up.

1.4. Work programme

Claudia Taylor East presented the main priorities identified in the 2008 work programme, namely transnationality, partnership (governance and delivery), social inclusion (with a particular focus on active inclusion), capacity-building and the manual.

2. Capacity-building needs

Document

[Preparing for capacity-building seminar](#)

On 30 October, EAPN will organize a capacity-building seminar on structural funds. This follows a new priority in the EAPN strategic plan, and similar seminars will take place/have taken place in the other working groups. Based on the preparation work asked ahead of the meeting, members split into three groups to discuss their current concerns and practical recommendations for the October seminar.

Feedback

The feedback session focused on the recommendations for the seminar. More information on the networks' priorities and concerns can be found in the tables prepared by participants (to be sent to the group).

Group 1:

- we could discuss how to increase the number of small NGOs who access structural funds
- the representativity of NGOs on the monitoring committees could be an interesting theme (need to increase lobby capacity to be able to join these groups)
- we could invite intermediary bodies for global grants and set up a network for sharing experience
- we could invite representatives of European regions active in structural funds

Group 2:

- we should present practical experiences – getting access to structural funds/translating it to own context/ process of getting involved in the monitoring committees and the process of structural funds in their own countries
- we could discuss how to use the EU to lobby the national level
- transnationality could be a thematic focus

Group 3:

- we should target the current focus on larger projects (which makes it difficult for smaller NGOs)
- we need to address the capacity of the sector to lobby the European Commission and, more generally, do lobbying
- transnational initiatives should be a thematic focus – examine and raise questions, revisiting the idea of a technical assistance project
- with regard to the convergence areas, we should see how structural funds can directly support capacity building (and not only technical assistance) to NGOs
- we need to get some trusts/foundations for the NGO sector at national level – co-financing;
- we should challenge the trend against social inclusion and NGOs and prepare our own mid-term evaluation before 2010;
- we should make demands on behalf of NGOs for 2010;
- the seminar needs to transfer what other EAPN working groups are doing
- we need to share information in a productive way (showcasing as UK did – looking at examples at what has and what has not been achieved)

Action

- Elodie Fazi will prepare the seminar with the support of Tanya Basarab, (Development Officer) based on the proposals made
- National information prepared for the seminar will be made available to the whole working group

3. Partnership

3.1. Focus on the French situation

Introduction

Samuel Le Floch (EAPN France) presented some of the main problems linked to the French situation on structural funds, in particular problems of access for small organizations, together with stronger financial risk. In addition, delays of payment leave access to structural funds to the biggest organizations (bank costs not eligible).

Presentation by AVISE of actions to support NGOs

AVISE (*Agence de Valorisation des Initiatives Socio-Economiques*, www.avise.org) was created as a resource centre on social economy. They started to work on structural funds in 2004, after realizing a strong under-spending of ESF, and numerous obstacles: lack of access to information (NGOs see ESF as inaccessible), lack of expertise and administrative capacity. Several actions were put in place:

- Information and monitoring (decrypt and translate information: information briefing, trainings)
- Practical guide published in 2005
- Some trainings were organized (not only for information but also to support organizations benefiting already from ESF and prevent management problems)
- Hotline system to help solve problems.

AVISE also put a specific focus on building the capacity of the NGO sector across all the stages, not necessarily linked to ESF. The activities were financed by technical assistance, with no costs for participants. AVISE is also supported by the *Caisse des Dépôts et Conciliation*. For the new programming period, they answered a call for proposal and will not anymore be funded by technical assistance, but by a specific ESF line.

The following points were mentioned in the exchange with members:

- NGOs are more represented in the monitoring committee than before. In the new programming period, there is an attempt to transpose this partnership to a regional level.
- AVISE tried to map similar structures from throughout the EU and it might be interesting to network more with such organizations. Yet at the moment the priority is to contribute to the dynamic between NGO networks on a regional level.
- The programme for micro NGO projects has been renewed for the new programming period, and is the only measure financed 100% by the ESF (over 3000 projects funded in the last programming period). Maximum grant should be around 23 000 €. Yet NGOs might not be able to act as intermediary body this time.

- The question of pre- and co-financing remains key. At local level, banks can help support some activities on a more ad hoc basis.
- About transnationality, one specific axis will look at networking between the partners. But the next call will be next year (between January and June 2009). Based on the experience from EQUAL, it appears useful to focus on specific points, and foresee some technical assistance.
- Some information will soon be available in English on the website.

3..2. EAPN's perspective and action

See documents:

- [Social NGOs' demands on partnership](#)
- [Presentation to Community of Practice](#) (Vienna)

Elodie Fazi presented the latest development with regard to partnership.

- Several meetings were held with the European Commission (ESF coordination Unit within DG Employment and relations with NGOs within DG Regio). These led to some positive developments (more access to information, translation of operational programmes, possibility of regular dialogue with the ESF committee and more open dialogue with the Commission). Yet there is little commitment and low political will.
- The Community of Practice on Partnership (one of the transnational thematic networks) has been another positive development, in that EAPN has been invited to contribute on a more regular basis. Yet we need to be cautious, as its potential and outcomes remain limited.

It was stressed that we are in post EQUAL era, where we need to rethink our access to structural funds and how to do our lobbying. We need to make a "restart".

Some members expressed concerns about their own national situation

In Spain, there is a good interaction with the national management unit and the ministry in Spain. Yet there is a problem at the level of the region. Around 3000 persons attended regional seminars on the funds, but results are poor.

In Ireland, social inclusion is not seen anymore as a priority. NGOs can be on the management committee because of social partnership, but their influence is minimalist. Access to funds will be mainly through local authorities and government agencies – with an unequal partnership. It is not clear how the reflection of social inclusion will be monitored – the inputs that try to put social inclusion higher on the agenda have so far been ignored.

In Slovenia, there is not enough knowledge within NGOs on how the Structural Funds work. Poverty is an unrecognized reality in Slovenia and cross-border cooperation is important.

Future EAPN action

The following proposals were made for future action:

- The Commission is starting to become part of the problem rather than of the solution (for example by refusing leveraging system used by the UK). We have to raise our voice and put our

weight behind active inclusion. We need to think of how to lobby more strongly and put the argument of subsidiarity.

- MEPs can become allies in putting pressure on the Commission. More specifically, there will be a report on governance by French MEP Jean Marie Beaupuy (draft will be ready in September) and we need to get him on board for media work
- We need to use the momentum of the upcoming French Presidency and within the European Commission with regard to Active Inclusion and make a proposal before December
- Two important dates in the next few weeks will be the publication of the 5th Interim Report on Cohesion to be published by the European Commission in June, as well as that of a new European Social Agenda.
- Our current concerns need to be tackled by addressing monitoring committees along with the Parliament and the Commission. Yet this needs to be complemented by actions in Member States.

Action

- **These concerns will be raised during the October meeting with the Commission desks officers**
- **We might reply to the evaluation of programming documents just published by the Commission, taking into account other developments (Social Agenda, Interim Report on Cohesion)**
- **We will bring together examples of good and bad practices in a policy document to be finalized for the October meeting**
- **Overall, EAPN needs to become more critical of the European Commission and get support from the European Parliament**

4. Structural funds and social inclusion

Documents:

- [Power Point Presentation prepared structural funds and wider EU debate](#)
- [Commission Communication on adoption programming documents](#)
- [NGO contribution to conference on future of cohesion policy](#)
- [Conclusions conference on future cohesion policy](#)

Fintan Farrell made a presentation on current debates around the role of structural funds and their contribution to social inclusion: future of structural funds, budget, OMC, Lisbon strategy, 2010 Year against Poverty and Social Exclusion. He stressed the difficulty to make a evaluation of how structural funds are being used to deliver on social inclusion, especially for networks with low resources. Would it be possible to work on indicators and send questionnaires to managing authorities?

The following points were mentioned in the discussion:

- The EU Year 2010 for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion will be the mid term of this new programming period and represent a good moment for evaluation (although this time there is not obligation for mid term review)
- In addition, ex post evaluations are being commissioned and will come out during the preparation for the 2010 Year.

- We should try to get involved around events on evaluation and closing of the previous programming period, to make sure that lessons are learnt.
- It is also crucial to bring in the work done by the other EAPN working groups, in particular around Lisbon and the OMC on Social Inclusion and Social Protection (NAPs being presented this Autumn).
- At national level structural funds end up being used by a closed club. In some countries they are also being politically controlled. We should not care only about our own access, but also that of SMEs, social economy, cooperatives...
- Social inclusion is also seen as role of DG employment rather than DG regio and we need to challenge this vision. In addition, structural funds' contribution to social inclusion is making steps back or is not acknowledged enough across the EU (Poland, Portugal, Spain, Ireland).
- The work done on social inclusion indicators might help to achieve this. Malta, Ireland, Portugal used the document. Feedback was positive in some countries, lacking in others. It is important that networks challenge their own managing authorities to see what indicators are being used. Indicators are good document but we need to develop them further them about good management. We might produce guidelines on how networks can use indicators, collect factual evidence about difficulties we face.
- National Networks need to be more structured and efficient to follow what is being done.

Action

Working group members are encouraged to:

- **based on the tools developed by the EAPN secretariat (NAPs and Lisbon toolkits), get in touch with other EAPN members on the NAPs and Lisbon strategy to look at how the ESF is used for social inclusion purposes**
- **send the social indicators' document to their managing authority and monitoring committees if this was not done yet**
- **get involved in activities around evaluation and closing of the programming period, to promote a social inclusion perspective**

At European level, the following proposals will be considered:

- **Supporting members getting involved in Lisbon and NAPs**
- **Making more extensive version of social inclusion indicators document in 2009 and send questionnaire to managing authorities**
- **Lobby for a parliamentary question on the lack of social inclusion perspective in this programming period, get in touch and ask for other reports within European Parliament, Committee of the Regions**

5. Manual

Document/

Manual outline

<http://www.eapn.eu/images/docs/2008%20manual%20outline.doc>

Brian Harvey presented to the outline of the Manual to be published by the end of the year. 15 working days are available, which means the manual will be developed through desk research mostly (including a questionnaire to both national networks and managing authorities).

The following points were mentioned during the discussion:

- We need to make sure there is a clear difference between this manual and the last one, published two years ago.
- It is important to use the manual to underline good practices on how to use the funds for social inclusion.
- Translation will be very important if we wish to do make it widely know: yet it is at the moment foreseen to have it only in EN and FR.
- Is it possible to widen the potential target to involve people interested in the use of the funds?
- It can be useful as well to refer to bad examples.
- However, the lack of political will remain a key issue
- The terms of references of managing authorities could be used in the manual, as well as examples of good practices from EQUAL

Following the discussion, it was agreed that the manual will be going more in the direction of a tool for lobby and advocacy rather than how to access projects. It should aim also to challenge the current market-driven approach to structural funds.

Action

- **We will move forward based on the outline proposed. Despite some changes in the objectives, no new outline will be circulated**
- **A questionnaire will be circulated to the members by end of June by Brian Harvey**

6. Transnationality

Document:

[Information note on transnationality](#)

There are different ways to organize the vacuum left by EQUAL. In the UK, about 45 OPs have transnationality as priority, and a committee has been established. The transnational bidding round will be launched soon (no requirement that partners be ESF funded), with the most popular theme being active inclusion.

Round table:

- Germany: € 120 million are devoted to transnationality. Germany is supporting the setting up of thematic networks between managing authorities
- Spain: within the discrimination OP, there is room for transnationality. Yet this concerns primarily big NGOs, there is no policy of transmitting to the regional level.
- In Belgium, there is little focus on transnational themes.
- In Sweden (to complement...)
- In France, the intermediary body for transnationality has been identified and first call launched in April.
- In Poland, transnationality is a horizontal issue linked to innovation. The managing authority has not defined specific themes. The ministry for labour and social policy is responsible, together with 16 intermediary bodies. More information will be available after December 2008.
- In Bulgaria it seems there will not be much transnationality especially for NGOs.
- In the Czech Republic, the first calls were launched.
- In Ireland, the focus will be mainly be on activation and participation in the labour market. Yet the government made will not provide the matching funds.
- In Austria, transnationality is not an end in itself. The only current call is about science.

Elodie Fazi reported on the different elements of transnationality in the new programming period (see note distributed to the group). Next to the classical transnational projects, managing authorities are also supporting the setting up of platforms on thematic (roma, youth unemployment...) or governance issue (on each of the EQUAL principles, including transnationality and partnership).

The next six months will be crucial for our work on transnationality, as the funds available will probably be gone by 2009. We should remind Member States of the importance of active inclusion as a theme and see how EAPN can engage its own work on active inclusion. It might be for us a way to find a strategy for resourcing networks.

Action

- **The secretariat will keep on monitoring transnational developments**
- **The possibility of submitting a transnational project will be explored**
- **Ray Phillips will pass on guidelines on transnational networks and active inclusion**

Working group members are encouraged to:

- **register on the Community of Practice on Transnationality (www.transnationality.eu) to get more information**
- **see how to support the setting up of transnational thematic networks on active inclusion**

7. Next meeting

The next meeting will be on 30-31 October in Brussels