

Information note (structural funds)
Transnational dimension and social inclusion in the 2007-2013 period: a state of play

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The end of EQUAL raises a number of questions for NGOs which found in this programme an important catalyst for transnational cooperation and networking with like-minded organizations from throughout the EU. One year after the start of the new programming period, a lot of these questions remain unanswered, as only a minority of Operational Programmes have been approved.

This information note therefore aims to present some key channels for transnational cooperation that can be of interest to social inclusion NGOs in the new programming period: transnational dimension within ESF OPs, INTERREG IV C and URBACT.

1. Transnational dimension within new ESF OPs

With the disappearance of the EQUAL programme, it is mostly up to the Member States to ensure a transnational dimension in relation to social inclusion priorities, which can be achieved in different ways.

- A guidance note was published by a grouping of EQUAL managing authorities, which provides a useful basis for reflection: *Transnational and interregional cooperation in the new ESF Programmes – a framework for programming* http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/data/document/200606-reflection-note-trans_en.pdf

Different ways of organizing transnational cooperation

Article 3.6 of the ESF regulation specifies: “The ESF shall also support transnational and interregional actions in particular through the sharing of information, experiences, results and good practices, and through developing complementary approaches and coordinated or joint action.” Management authorities are left to decide modalities of transnational cooperation, as well as its thematic priorities. Yet each Operational Programme (thereafter OP) should specify the type, scope and form of transnational and interregional co-operation it wishes to support, which can be organized in different ways:

- mainstreaming throughout one or several ESF priority axes,
 - one dedicated priority axis for the whole OP,
 - mixture of both.
- See for example **France's** ESF OP, (p. 89): interregional and transnational cooperation are subject to a specific priority axis within the OP (axis 4 – amounting to 9% of total budget), but also “mainstreamed” in axis 3, devoted to the fight against discrimination. They will be targeted to innovative projects (for instance in the field of non-discrimination), partnerships and mobility. NGOs and NGO networks are explicitly quoted as potential partners in transnational projects. http://82.138.79.135/fse/IMG/pdf/Programme_FSE-2.pdf
 - The **Malta** ESF OP specifies (p.53) on the contrary that “Transnational / interregional co-operation will be implemented under all the Priority Axes of the Operational Programme within the context of innovation. The OP specifies that “The objective of transnational/interregional co-operation is to contribute to economic and social cohesion by improving strategy and delivery of employment, education and vocational training, social inclusion, equality, and capacity building policies through collaboration across national borders. Such co-operation will allow for sharing of experience and expertise between a broad range of actors including public authorities, Social Partners, and organisations from the Civil Society.” <http://www.mfin.gov.mt/image.aspx?site=MFIN&ref=OP2>

A limited role for the European Commission, despite the need for coordination

The European Commission has made it clear that its role will be supportive, but some guidance and coordination structures will for sure be needed. The risk of a lack of a sufficient European perspective in social inclusion projects appears high. To tackle this, the EQUAL guide on the future of transnational cooperation had identified a number of recommendations, which included in particular:

- *“Member States should take and communicate clear decisions on the activities they propose to make eligible.*
- *To relate individual project results to policies, Member States should agree to collaborate to create thematic clusters based on Lisbon guidelines.*
- *An easily-accessible platform should be available for partner-search and matching.*
- *Approval of transnational priorities in ESF should rest with the Managing Authority whose budget is being used - in case of shared obligations between projects or other partners, coordination between managing authorities will be needed.*
- *Each Member State should be responsible for the documentation and monitoring of transnational work of, but there should be provision for joint evaluation of partnerships and activities”.*

Yet the European Commission has so far not produced any clear answer on how this is being monitored in the negotiations, and on the type of guidance it will provide.

Timeline

The first calls for transnational projects will depend from the timing of adoption of ESF OPs: while some have already been adopted (such as France, Denmark, Malta), others are still being negotiated with the European Commission.

2. Interreg IV C

The Operational Programme of Interreg IV C has been submitted to the European Commission in July 2007, and the programme was launched during a conference taking place in Portugal in September¹. A total of 302 million EUR should be devoted to it, from the ERDF budget (to be completed by co-financing). More information can be found on:

- Interreg IV C website: http://www.interreg3c.net/web/fic_en
- Interreg IVC OP submitted to Commission in July 2007, still to be approved: http://www.svlr.gov.si/fileadmin/svlr/srp.gov.si/pageuploads/cilj_3/OP_INTERREG_IVC_-_ZADNJA_VERZIJA.pdf
- FAQ on Interreg IV C http://www.interreg3c.net/sixcms/media.php/5/2007-07-20_FAQ.doc

Types of project supported (see p.39)

There will be different types of projects: **“regional initiative projects”** (classical interregional cooperation projects, to address a common challenge such as exchange of experience, knowledge and good practice). The monitoring committee will open call on regular basis.

For the first time INTERREG will also propose **“capitalization” projects**, aimed at disseminating a number of already identified good practices. They will include regions with a different level of experience on a specific issue. The Commission will provide specific support to applications projects which fit particularly with its “regions for economic change” initiative, designed as **“fast track projects”**.

Participation of NGOs as partners

Interreg IVC is dedicated primarily to regions and local authorities (only bodies that can participate as partners, together with “bodies generated by public law”). Beyond a reference to the partnership principle (p. 67), very few references are made to civil society as potential partners in projects. Yet NGOs, as other private sector bodies, can “participate in the operations at their own costs” but also be subcontracted by partners to provide services or assist in implementation of certain activities.

¹ <http://www.interreg3c.net/interreg4c/mailling/invitation.htm>

Topics: is inclusion a priority?

Social inclusion is primarily seen through the employment and human capital approach, and potential projects identified include among others local employment development, participation of discriminated groups (see p. 47). Regarding more specifically the so-called fast track projects (supported more directly by the Commission), a number of priority issues are linked to social inclusion. They include in particular “integrating marginalized youth” and “managing migration and facilitating social integration” (see p. 83 of the OP).

The process now

The programme was officially launched during a conference in September (<http://www.interreg3c.net/interreg4c/mailling/invitation.htm>). The first calls for proposals should not be launched before, and there should be at least a two or three month deadline for them. The first approvals should not be approved before May 2008.

What could be EAPN's involvement?

Primary partners will public authorities. However EAPN members are welcome to contact them to point at good practices that should be shared, but also invite them to submit applications on projects linked to social inclusion. Potential partnership could also be made at European level with networks of regional and local authorities. Fast track projects might also be an entry point for the technical assistance project. Yet any further involvement will be subject to a deeper analysis of eligible costs, as the programme supports primarily activities, but no running costs.

3. URBACT II

URBACT² is a community initiative programme generated from the URBAN programme. The main objective of the URBACT II programme is *"to improve the effectiveness of sustainable integrated urban development policies in Europe with a view to implementing the Lisbon and Göteborg strategies"*. EAPN has not engaged with it as a European network, but the importance given to inclusion priority might open a new entry point for transnational cooperation.

- URBACT II website: <http://urbact.eu/towards-urbact-2.html>
- URBACT II programme submitted to the European Commission in June 2007 (to be approved) http://urbact.eu/fileadmin/corporate/Official_documents/URBACT_II_OP_30_june_07.doc

Type of projects supported

URBACT aims to develop exchanges of experience between cities and actors which have been involved in the URBAN Programmes since the late 1980s (URBAN Pilot Projects and URBAN I and II), while contributing to an improvement of actions carried out at local and regional level. In this view it co-finances a wide range of actions to favour exchanges of experience (such as thematic networks, working groups, studies, qualification actions and other initiatives).

Partnership and NGOs

URBACT II will be open to cities from the EU, Norway and Switzerland, as well as to regional authorities and universities. Each network will be restricted to 12 partners (including no more than 4 regional authorities/universities). NGOs are thus not recognised as direct project partners. Yet they are clearly recognised as “key partners” in terms of integrated development of deprived areas (and this specific part also recognises the need for specific financial schemes, such as micro-credit and small scale loans, which can be of interest to NGOs: see p. 51).

Priority given to inclusion

Social inclusion is tackled through different aspects: employment and human capital (in particular support to marginalized groups, see p.50), development of deprived areas (p. 51, with specific focus on the role of NGOs) and social cohesion. On the latter, the OP (see p. 52) acknowledges “the battle against social exclusion is a key challenge”. It therefore suggests that potential networks could be devoted to: “Housing, Migrants and ethnic

² See http://urbact.eu/no_cache/news-events/newsletter/categories/right-area-category/article/default-title-23.html?tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=166 for more information on URBACT 2

minorities, Young people and children, Gender equality, Improvement of social services (health services...), Increased security for citizens, Social exclusion and spatial exclusion, Demographic issues, Cultural Sector”.

Timetable

The first calls for proposals should be published in October 2007.

Potential EAPN strategy

NGOs are not identified as partners, but as key actors of URBACT II, particularly in the field of urban regeneration. A first strategy could be to identify on an ad hoc basis (after calls are published) which networks we would like set up contacts with. Yet, if we decide to use URBACT as a support to the technical assistance project, a more pro-active approach should be adopted (EAPN might need to actively liaise with cities' networks and propose them to submit a proposal). Yet, as for Interreg, any further involvement will be subject to a deeper analysis of measures eligible, as the programme supports primarily activities, but no running costs.