



EUROPEAN UNION
European Social Fund

Knowledge Information Tools

A strategy to reinforce transnational
co-operation and social innovation in the
European Social Fund in Sweden.



The Swedish
ESF Council

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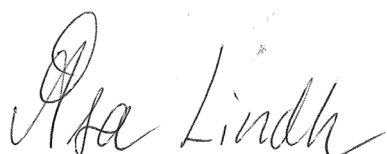
The future of Europe – co-operation between Member States

One of the cornerstones of the European project is transnational co-operation: working together with various actors in other Member States to develop and improve methods, systems and policies in a number of different policy fields. The European Social Fund aims to make a decisive impact to reinforce transnational co-operation.

Both the EU Commission and the Swedish ESF Council view transnational co-operation as an important issue tool for shaping the future. This is why we are putting extra effort into making it easier for project actors within the European Social Fund to work transnationally.

The Swedish ESF Council has adopted the present strategy for transnationality and social innovation. The ESF Committee, which is the EU Commission's and the Member States common forum for developing the European Social Fund, has appointed a working group to develop and reinforce transnationality and social innovation during the current as well as the proceeding programme period.

Not only does transnational co-operation generate added value in the form of better and more sustainable project results, it also contributes towards shaping a European perspective and way of thinking – *a true European mindset*. Transnational co-operation facilitates the development of innovative ideas, concepts, methods and policies which will contribute to realising the European Union's overarching strategy for the future Europe, *EU 2020*.



Stockholm, Sweden
June 2010
Director General Åsa Lindh
Swedish ESF Council

Purpose

The strategy will reinforce the knowledge and competence base of the ESF Council and Structural Fund Partnerships, improve information and support for project actors and develop tools and methods that support practical transnational co-operation in projects and in thematic groups.

It will also clarify and develop the connection between transnationality and social innovation in accordance with the EU Commission's objectives for ongoing development work taking place within the frame of the ESF Committee's ad-hoc group¹. The issue of social innovation is dealt with in a special section of this document but will be integrated with transnational activities.

A strategy to reinforce transnational co-operation primarily concerns the following parties: Swedish ESF Council staff at various levels, Structural Fund Partnerships, Monitoring Committee members, ESF project and process support and potential project managers and actors.

The strategy also aims to make a contribution to that those concerned are in time willing and able to incorporate a **true European mindset** into their daily activities in the labour market and working life policy field.² This means continually participating in, and developing, formal and informal transnational networks that have been established in projects and thematic groups, both within and outside the ESF framework.

Actors and target groups

The **Swedish ESF Council**, in its capacity as the government body responsible for the European Social Fund in Sweden, has two important tasks. The first is to ensure that its own organisation³ and that of other concerned actors embody a sufficient level of relevant knowledge and competence. The second is to ensure the existence of a robust infrastructure for carrying out transnational co-operation in projects and thematic groups. Regional contact persons for transnational co-operation in the eight regional offices of the ESF Council play a key role.

The **Structural Fund Partnership** is the most important policy actor at the regional level in the ESF. The Structural Fund Partnership decides the priorities and orientation of the re-

¹ At the ESF Committee's meeting in November 2009 it was decided to establish an ad-hoc group which included representatives from all Member States in order to develop transnationality and social innovation in the European Social Fund (documentation from the ad-hoc group can be found on CIRCA).

² For a discussion of a European mindset, see the report entitled *Transnational and Interregional Cooperation in ESF programmes in the 2007-2013 programme period. A framework for programming*. Working Group of Member States on transnational and inter-regional co-operation (June 2006) and *An investment in Europe's present and future*. Ruth Santos, Ecotec (2005).

³ The task is defined within the government agency's Operational Plan, sub-objective 1 and 2: *Competence – right balance of staff resources and relevant competencies* and *Competence – attractive workplaces* (OP directive 2009-10-05)

gional plans and ensures that the transnational dimension is maintained and adapted to regional circumstances, objectives and priorities.

The **Structural Fund Partnership** can also play an important role in transnational co-operation through contacts and exchanges with other similar regional constellations in other Member States. These allow gathering experiences and knowledge from other Member States and regions which can be incorporated into regional plans and calls for proposals.

The **ESF Monitoring Committee** will ensure that the transnational dimension is enlivened in accordance with current programme documents and that follow-up and evaluations of the programme also cover the transnational work carried out in projects and thematic groups.

Project actors, both in existing projects and thematic groups and potential applicants, have a given key role with regards to transnational co-operation in various forms.⁴

Project and process support in ESF is, in addition to the ESF Council, the most important resource for information and support to project actors in various stages of the project process. Better co-operation in ESF requires them having a well defined task in connection with project and process support. The special **co-ordination process support** plays a central role.

Thematic groups have an important task in transnational co-operation, among else by way of their participation in transnational learning networks. The thematic groups can be appointed by the ESF Council/managing government bodies to participate in the learning networks. The delegation of tasks and responsibilities between thematic groups and the ESF Council are thereby clearly laid out. The ESF Council has always prime responsibility for Swedish participation in the transnational learning networks.

1. Knowledge and competence

More knowledgeable and competent civil servants and managers at the ESF Council and among members of Structural Fund Partnerships in order to successfully implement the European Social Fund in Sweden.

A better and more effective transnational co-operation and a more developed and deeper rooted European dimension in the ESF requires programme officers and managers at the ESF Council and members of Structural Fund Partnerships to have sufficient knowledge about the European Employment Strategy, current guidelines and recommendations as well as the Open Method of Co-ordination. They should also be given the opportunity to be oriented in employment and labour market policies in other Member States and, when relevant, regions.

⁴ In January 2010 there were 515 approved/ongoing projects in Programme Areas 1 and 2 together (preparatory and implementation projects). 67 of these had made a budget allowance in their application for transnational co-operation activities.

Better knowledge...

Though the evaluations carried out so far by the ESF in Sweden have only just touched on the subject of transnational co-operation, they revealed general shortcomings among relevant actors' understanding of the ESF programme and its relevance for regional and national employment policies. Understanding of the relationship between the different actors and their respective roles also lacks clarity⁵.

In addition to the suggested measures aimed at increasing knowledge, an important component of evaluations in the future must be to assess the results and value of transnational co-operation and the European dimension in programme, policy and system development.

... increases motivation

More knowledge of transnationality is necessary in order to be able to properly assess project applications and the value of the results and products they generate, e.g. in relation to current national and European policies. Transnational co-operation also generates new perspectives on one's own situation and strategies. By recognizing that programme and development activities, along with ongoing projects, are part of a larger European context, one's own motivation increases.

A European perspective on activities, the local and regional labour market and work life policies and development and project work generally increases motivation and increases understanding for European employment strategy and the European Community⁶.

Therefore, those key actors that work with the European Social Fund should be expected to have a good understanding of European employment policy and transnationality.

a. Network meetings and seminars

In order to achieve this increase in knowledge and competence, ESF Council staff and members of the Structural Fund Partnerships should be given the opportunity to participate in a joint network and a seminar series around the themes of employment policy, the European Social Fund and transnationality. This would allow for a constructive dialogue between the ESF Council and the Structural Fund Partnerships and even be broadened to include other areas as well.

This can suitably be done in one region as a pilot project to serve as an example for others. Regions can also on their own organize activities designed to increase knowledge and competence regarding transnationality.

⁵ Three evaluations have been carried out of the ESF in Sweden: a) *Samverkan för ökad kund- och uppgiftsfokus* (200), b) *Rätt lösning för rätt problem* (2009) and c) *Bättre kvalitet i projekt och program* (2010). Despite transnationality being highlighted in both the programme document and the Council's regulation, is not dealt with in any of the above evaluations. The total budget allocation for transnationality in implementation projects in Priority Area 1 and 2 amounts to approximately 20 million SEK (approx. 2.1 million Euro).

⁶ Sub-objective 2 in the ESF Council's OP –guidelines: *Competence – Attractive workplaces* (OP-Directive 2001-10-04)

The **regional contact persons** for transnationality have an important role to play in this regard. They can, having first undergone comprehensive training in the concerned fields (see below), also function as experts and provide support for competence development.

b. Newsletter and information on the website

The establishment of an enhanced external information gathering capacity, with a European focus, and in co-operation with national and regional thematic groups will be a starting point. ESF Council staff and Structural Fund Partnership members are kept à jour, by way of a newsletter and continuous information and analyses, of European Employment Policy and flanking policy fields relevant to the various priority themes. Thematic groups have a key role to play and can contribute with information and analyses to the ESF Council. Thematic groups can also, as in other areas, function as knowledge hubs between projects, European networks and thematic groups, the ESF Council and Structural Fund Partnerships.⁷

c. Exchange of programme officers and training initiatives

Both programme officers at the ESF Council and members of Structural Fund Partnerships can, when time and available funds allow, participate in exchanges between sister organizations in other Member States and regions. The European Public Administration school – EIPA (The European Institute of Public Administration⁸) offers a number of tailor suited training courses in various fields. Opportunities for competence development and exchange projects within the EU Progress⁹ Programme, and elsewhere, should be explored. Regional contact persons and regional managers should be given priority for further training and exchanges. Participating in the European thematic groups' network meetings and activities offers another valuable opportunity to learn and exchange experience.

d. Co-operation with other government bodies

A number of government bodies that manage EU programmes could co-operate around transnationality. Exchanges of civil servants and joint seminars to allow the exchange of experience and know-how and, importantly, more effective partner searching and increased complementarity between programmes through co-operation in drafting project applications and selecting projects are examples of what such co-operation could result in.

Regular meetings are held between the International Programme Office for Education and Training and the Swedish ESF Council in order to develop co-operation also on transnational-

⁷ Thematic groups have, by way of their contacts with projects in Sweden and other Member States (via European networks/thematic groups), and their task of reviewing, analysing and impacting on systems and policies, an excellent position/opportunity to gather and pass on current information to the ESF Council, Structural Fund Partnerships and the Monitoring Committees.

⁸ EIPA is a training institute for the public sector supported by the EU Commission and Member States. An interesting example of EIPA's training concerns members of Monitoring Committees for ESF. See: [Supporting the Programme Monitoring Committees in EU Structural Funds](#)

⁹ Progress is an EU programme for supporting implementation of EU's employment and social policy at local and regional level and thereby a tool for achieving the Lisbon Strategy.

ity. Similar co-operation has been initiated with Arbetsförmedlingen – the Swedish Public Employment Service.

2. Information and support

Improved information and more effective support to project actors for greater professionalism.

The project and process support services that were established in 2009 have a key role to play in providing information and support on transnationality to project actors in all stages of the project process. This group also needs special training measures that guarantee a high level and uniform quality and service provision with regards to transnationality. The co-ordinated process support should be able to play a key role.

Regional, national and European networks and thematic groups¹⁰.

During the spring of 2009, a number of regional and national thematic groups were set up to map, validate, refine and exploit experiences and results from ESF projects (as well as other relevant EU programmes).

Thematic groups have an especially important role to play in transnational co-operation. The aim is for them to also function as hubs in relation to the European thematic groups, both gathering and delivering good examples and recommendations for policy and system development.¹¹

The European networks and thematic groups are active in a number of key ESF themes and target groups, including partnerships, integration of migrants and asylum seekers, Roma, gender equality, work organization, youth, empowerment, social economy, entrepreneurship and age discrimination. In addition to these, and others, there is a European co-operation constellation in the area of ESF administration.

The EU Commission's recently established support structure for European thematic groups and networks provides administrative and policy support to concerned actors.

Within the frame of the ESF Council's strategy, and linked to guidance support (see below), an inventory should be done of ongoing transnational efforts at EU level and Swedish involvement in these. This inventory should be kept updated and made readily available (on the website).

¹⁰ Terminology concerning transnational co-operation is not unambiguous. This heading includes all forms of transnational co-operation constellations in the ESF: Transnational Learning Networks, Community of Practice etc. The ESF Council will carry out a thorough review of transnational terms and concepts.

¹¹ During the preceding programme period, a number of thematic groups, especially under Equal, functioned as effective conveyors of good practice and policy recommendations. One example is the *National thematic group on asylum* (in Sweden) which was also successful in establishing links to the *European thematic group on asylum* (ETG V). For more information, go to: www.temaasyl.se

Evaluation and validation

Effective and successful transnational co-operation requires ongoing follow-up and evaluation, both on the ESF Council's part as well as by the projects and thematic groups. Project and process support, as well as thematic groups, have an important role to play. The development of new tools and methods for transnational co-operation necessitates reliable evaluation of an area that so far has been largely neglected (see below). The Monitoring Committee will ensure that follow-up and evaluation of transnational co-operation is carried out at programme level.

Follow-up and evaluation concerns transnational co-operation as a **method** – how do tools, co-operation forms and mechanisms work – as well as the **results and products** generated by means of transnational co-operation. The added value of transnational co-operation also needs to be measured, if possible, and assessed.

Reporting, good examples, system and policy impact and feedback

Results and experiences from transnational co-operation need to be processed, analysed, validated and refined to achieve wider dissemination and system and policy impact. As noted above, this is a task for, among others, regional and national thematic groups. Proposals and recommendations should not only be based on Swedish project experiences and reports but equally from European thematic groups and networks.

Systematic reporting should also be done to the ESF Council at regional and central level.

Changes in the world around us, including policies, processes, programmes and priorities at EU level, need to be reflected in national and regional programmes and plans. This requires diligent external information gathering and reporting by individual projects with transnational involvement and, at an aggregated level, from thematic groups.

Information and analyses also need to be included in the collected inventory of project experiences and provide nourishment for proposals and recommendations for improving systems and policies.

Analyses of good practice, and of the critical mass of project experiences linked to external information gathering at national and EU level, can often highlight policy gaps, thus providing an important contribution for revision and the future orientation of project and programme activities. Suitable reporting channels from thematic groups, process support and the regional level in ESF to the head office should be set up. It is also important to have the means and competencies for gathering and analyzing results collected through outlook information gathering and project experiences both national and transnationally.

3. Tools and methods

Developing tools and methods for transnational co-operation; information material and guidance

Systematic, effective and successful transnational co-operation requires developing and applying tailor made tools and methods, both at project and thematic group level. It is necessary to take stock of, and evaluate, currently used tools and methods in order for the process and project support function to be able to provide project actors with suitable suggestions based on the specific objectives and purposes of transnational co-operation.

An initial stock tacking of existing tools and methods shows that there is a relatively wide selection of such tools and models. However, many of these are unknown to Swedish project actors. Below are a few examples of tools and methods.¹² This section will be developed in collaboration with the project and process support for strategic impact and learning.

Relevant tools and methods can fit, in different combinations, into the various levels and categories of transnational co-operation as determined by the ESF Council.

Levels:

1. Between projects from two or more Member States. These projects can be involved in similar or complementary fields, can also share common or complementary methods but must be interested in developing common strategies, methods or products.

2. Between thematic networks where participating projects share, at European level, the experiences they have developed in their respective national or regional networks. The European Commission and programme responsible in each Member State also participate in this task. They review strategic approaches and their results, assess their relevance at EU level, and disseminate them to discussion and political forums throughout all of Europe.

3. Between administrative bodies, national support structures and key persons and organizations throughout the EU. Responsible administrative bodies under the ESF have committed themselves to co-operate closely and learn together by way of working groups and meetings that are co-ordinated by the EU Commission and by way of direct co-operation between Member States. This is also a necessary prerequisite for realizing transnational co-operation. Other similar forms of co-operation, such as between various NGO and representative bodies, are especially encouraged in the ESF 2007-2013 programme and can erect important structures for realizing the objectives of the European Social Fund programme.

¹² Based on a review applications for completed or ongoing ESF projects in 2009, study visits were, in quite a few cases, the only type of transnational activity to be undertaken.

Examples of the content of transnational co-operation:

- Exchange of information and experiences, e.g. study trips
- Joint activities, e.g. training, stock taking, analyses
- Incorporating and/or adapting models and products
- Joint project implementation
- Exchange of key persons, staff and participants

Information material and guidance

In addition to reviewing and disseminating tailor suited tools and methods, it is also recommended to update and revise the Guide to transnational and interregional co-operation in ESF 2007-2013 (*Guide till transnationellt och interregionalt samarbete i ESF 2007 – 2013*). An information brochure aimed at the wider public will also be produced.

The work of taking stock and assessing available tools and methods should rest primarily with process and project support for learning. Updating and revising the guide to transnational co-operation can also be in part be delegated to project support for learning, under leadership of the co-ordinated process support and in close co-operation with the European thematic groups and networks which work with developing instruments and methods for transnational co-operation.¹³

4. Administration, regulations, budget – resources, roles and mandates

It was previously unclear how formal and practical representation in the European thematic groups should be organised. Guidelines were also lacking, such as pertaining to “core partner” or “associate partner” co-financing. The division of responsibilities between the central and regional level is also unclear.

The various staff categories’ roles and mandates must be clarified and the cost of participation in transnational co-operation in various forums must be included in the budget.

The review of regulations etc. that was done in the frame of the self evaluation project only encompassed transnational activities to a limited extent. A necessary first step is to appoint a work group to review the above mentioned issues.

¹³ The transnational learning network *Increasing the participation of Migrants and Ethnic Minorities in Employment* will, among else, develop and adapt the method and instruments for *peer reviews*, *learning seminars*, *target group auditing* and indicators for *policy impact* (methods for measuring project and programme effects) for use in transnational co-operation. For more information, go to: <http://www.temaasyl.se/Templates/Page.aspx?id=3030> and links to previous articles. A special transnational learning network also exists to develop transnationality within the ESF.

5. Social innovation and transnationality

One of the key tasks for the ESF Committee's ad-hoc group for transnationality and innovation is to further develop and reinforce co-operation between transnational co-operation and social innovation.

This connection between transnationality and innovation exists and can be developed at a number of levels. Examples and reasoning on the relationship between transnationality and innovation can be found in one of the ad-hoc groups documents.¹⁴ It includes a matrix which shows how innovations that were generated in previous programmes and processes can make an impact at policy and programme level. The document also includes a short discussion on other issues related to transnationality and innovation. Within the frame of the Swedish ESF Council's strategy for transnationality and social innovation, it is recommended to launch a development effort in co-operation with a suitable research institute. Until this comes about, it is important to underline the key role that transnationality and social innovation have to play in improving efficiency and further development of the European Social Fund, both during the current programme period as well as the period stretching to 2020.¹⁵

Examples of relevant issues

- What is (social) innovation?
- What is the relationship between transnationality and social innovation?
- How does transnationality facilitate social innovation?
- Which methods and tools for transnational co-operation are especially conducive for promoting social innovation?
- What are obstacles to social innovation?
- What is the relationship between (social) innovation and audit?
- How can programme structure and implementation mechanisms be adapted to promote social innovation and transnationality?

In implementing the ESF Council's strategy for transnationality, issues relating to social innovation will be successively integrated in by developing terminology, concepts, methods, support and counselling resources. Once initiated, co-operation with a suitable research institute will be an important step towards laying a sound and scientific knowledge foundation for understanding the increasingly important problems and solutions today and in the future for the Swedish administration of the European Social Fund.

¹⁴ Reflections on the links between transnational co-operation and social innovation. Revised draft TNI_001

¹⁵ A broad exposé of questions in connection with social innovation can be found in documents from the EU Commission's workshop *Europe and social innovation* (BEPA/Bureau of European Policy Advisers 2009).



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