



European
Commission

Review of the European Code of Conduct on Partnership (ECCP)

Thematic Network on Partnership

Technical Dossier no. 7

June 2018

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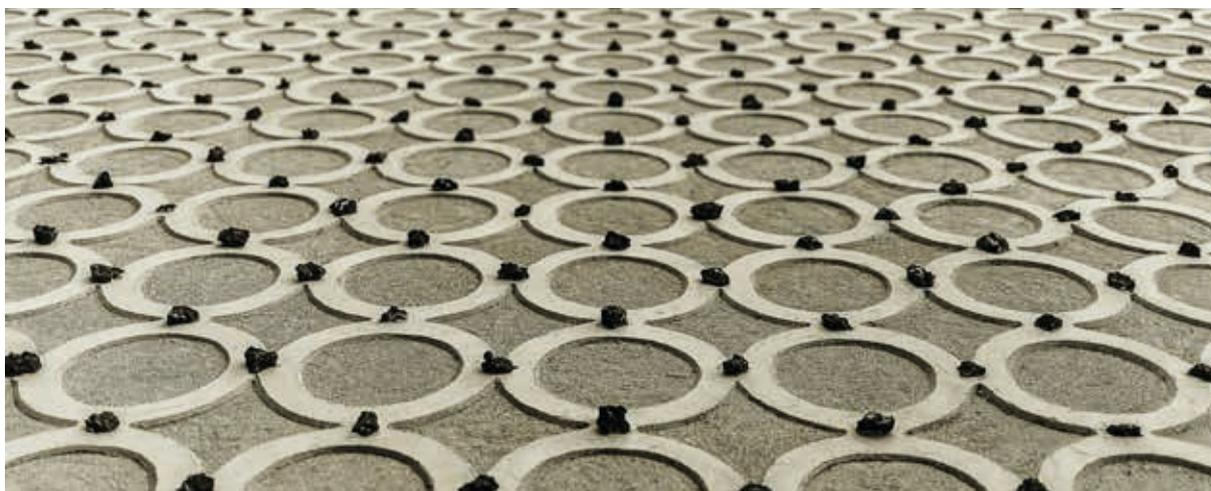
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1. INTRODUCTION



Source: Manuel Oliveros

Partnership is a dynamic and complementary relationship between diverse actors in which added value is achieved by working together rather than alone. In the ESF, partnerships are used to support policy linkages that promote growth and prosperity across the EU by reducing economic, social and territorial disparities through:

- *Encouraging employment and social inclusion at transnational, national, regional and local levels;*
- *Stimulating the involvement of diverse actors and approaches;*
- *Clearly defining target groups, objectives and priorities;*
- *Balancing competition and cooperation;*
- *Achieving benefits for both partners and wider society; and*
- *Building participatory democracy through collaborative decision-making.*

Community of Practice on Partnership (COP), 2009-11

Partnership between different actors in society is promoted globally as one of the most useful ways of addressing intractable social, economic and environmental challenges.¹ Through its adoption of the partnership principle, the European Union has led the way in demonstrating that issues such as access to employment and social exclusion are too complex for single institutions to address on their own, and that cooperation between different social actors is necessary for ensuring a sustainable and healthy European economy and environment.² The partnership principle is positioned as both a vehicle for promoting democracy and for assisting policy coherence through alignment of objectives between different levels of governance. These elements are central to

¹ See for example *United Nations agenda for 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgsproposal>

² http://ec.europa.eu/contracts_grants/funds_en.htm and see also Van den Brande (2014)

the **Europe 2020 Growth Strategy**³ for achieving smart, sustainable and inclusive growth; to the **European Semester**⁴ coordination framework and to the **European Pillar of Social Rights**.⁵ Recognition of the importance of the partnership principle is further manifested in the **Common Provisions Regulation for European Structural and Investment Funds** (EU Regulation No 1303/2013) and the **European Code of Conduct on Partnership** (ECCP) (European Commission 2014a), a delegated act which provides common standards for partner involvement in Partnership Agreements and Operational Programmes

³ https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/eu-economic-governance-monitoring-prevention-correction/european-semester/framework/europe-2020-strategy_en

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/eu-economic-governance-monitoring-prevention-correction/european-semester/framework/european-semester-why-and-how_en

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en

supported by European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF).

Between February 2017 and February 2018, the ESF Thematic Network on Partnership conducted a peer review of the ECCP. The initial findings and recommendations were shared in March 2018 alongside a proposed amendment for changes to Article 5 of the Common Provisions Regulation (see Annexes 1 and 2). This document presents the information gathered in more detail with illustrative examples of the partnership principle in action and an updated set of recommendations.

1.1 Purpose of the review

The aims of the review were to assess the usefulness of the ECCP, learn more about the challenges encountered in its execution, and develop recommendations to embed the partnership principle into the next ESIF programming

period (2021-27). The review also sought to raise awareness, promote consistency of approach to implementing the ECCP across the ESIF and offer examples of how the partnership principle can add value to programmes and positively impact on policy-making (see Annex 3 for full details of the ECCP review process).

1.2 Methodology

Data for the review were gathered from various sources, including a review of relevant documents on the partnership principle and its application during the 2014-20 programming period (see bibliography) and through survey work with ESF Managing Authorities, Intermediate Bodies, NGO stakeholders and social partners. Respondents were asked to comment on the implementation of the ECCP and share concrete examples of partnership in practice. Details of the information requested and the responses received are provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Survey for ECCP review

Date	Source	Information requested	Responses received
Feb-Mar 2017	Members of the Thematic Network on Partnership	Feedback and comments on partnership principles, practices and implementation issues related to the ECCP. Examples of 'good' (and 'bad') partnership practices (and ideas) for deeper embedding of partnership principles in ESIF.	From all core members
Mar-Oct 2017	Members of other Transnational Thematic Networks	Extent of awareness of ECCP. Feedback and comments on partnership practice and implementation issues related to the ECCP. Examples of 'good' (and 'bad') partnership practices for deeper embedding of partnership principles in ESIF.	Managing Authorities and Intermediate Bodies in Flanders (Belgium), Estonia, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Spain and Sweden, as well as EU-level stakeholders.
Oct-Jan 2017	ESIF Structured Dialogue members	In relation to the ECCP: - What has worked well? - What challenges have you encountered and what supports would be useful to address these? - What suggestions do you have for improving the ECCP text? Useful examples of partnership practices to share with others.	CEE Bankwatch, European LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD), European Network on Independent Living (ENIL), EuroChild, European University Association (EUA), German Social Welfare Organisations, Lumos and European Network of Citizens and Regions for the Social Economy (REVES).
Jan-Feb 2018	ESF Programme Monitoring Committees via a survey supported by European Commission	In relation to the ECCP: - What has worked well? - What challenges have you encountered and what support would be useful to address these? - What suggestions do you have for improving the ECCP text? - If you represent a Managing Authority, what support would help you to better achieve policy impacts through partnership working?	Responses were received from Programme Monitoring Committees via both individual members and collectively in Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain and Sweden.



2. WHY THE PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLE IS IMPORTANT



Source: Manuel Oliveros

Partnership has a clear added value in enhancing the effectiveness of the implementation of the European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds. It enhances collective commitment and ownership of Union policies, increases the available knowledge, expertise and viewpoints in the design and implementation of strategies and ensures greater transparency in decision-making processes.

ECCP

The ECCP's partnership principles offer great opportunities for improving decision-making processes by ensuring that different shareholders are duly represented.

Managing Authority, Latvia

More than just a concept, true partnerships are the most difficult, rewarding, and effective form of decision-making available to us in Europe.

Pobal

The Partnership Principle is vital to ensure high quality and sustainable reform.

Lumos

The partnership principle promotes connections **between different social actors and levels of government** in order to support effective delivery of ESIF (Van den Brande, 2014). The principle's main premise is that issues relating to access to employment and social exclusion are too complex for single institutions to address on their own, and that **cooperation between public authorities, social partners, NGOs, civil society organisations and individual citizens is necessary for job creation, competitiveness, economic growth, improved quality of life and sustainable**

development.⁶ By involving civil society organisations and citizens in decision-making processes, **partnership is also positioned as a vehicle for promoting democracy and for assisting policy coherence** through alignment of objectives between different levels of governance (Commission of the European Communities, 2001).

The recent socio-economic crisis in Europe has confirmed that **more strategic, integrated and innovative**

⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/contracts_grants/funds_en.htm

collaborative arrangements are needed to address complex challenges such as the concentration of unemployment among young people, older persons and migrants; gender segregation in the labour market; rural-urban inequalities, and shifts between industries, economic sectors and regions (Stott & Scoppetta, 2013). This affirmation is reinforced by the **European Semester** which promotes economic and policy coordination across EU Member States to ensure sound public finances, promote economic growth and prevent excessive macroeconomic imbalances, and the recent adoption of the **European Pillar of Social Rights** which sets out 20 key principles and rights to support fair and well-functioning labour markets and welfare systems.

These measures above also illustrate the interrelationship between poverty eradication, social inclusion and

environmental protection and **emphasise the need for partnership approaches that promote sustainable development** (CEE Bankwatch, 2017; Eurostat, 2017). As well as the **EU's Sustainable Development Strategy**,⁷ international interest in the potential of multi-actor partnerships to foster **innovative responses to address the complex and intertwined social, economic and environmental challenges** faced by all countries is highlighted in the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**.⁸ This agenda, which the EU played an important role in shaping,⁹ situates partnership as a transversal mechanism for achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and

⁷ <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/eussd/>

⁸ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingour-world>

⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/policies/european-development-policy/2030-agenda-sustainable-development_en

Table 2: The rationale for partnership in the ESIF

<p>Focus and coordination</p> <p>By harnessing the perspectives and resources of different societal actors the gaps, needs and priorities relating to Europe's development challenges are more clearly identified, and approaches that better incorporate the perspectives of end users and target groups created to address them. Policy coordination can also be synchronised so that the reach of programmes and projects is expanded and duplication avoided.</p>	<p><i>There's a relationship there and it's not just a personality thing, it's a shared understanding of the framework of what's being done. Now a number of things are short circuited; not accountability, not standards, but unnecessary procedures.</i></p> <p><i>Partnership is like playing in an orchestra, it helps players stay focused and attuned.</i></p>
<p>Access to resources and innovative approaches</p> <p>A range of diverse contributions can be obtained from different stakeholders to address particular problems and challenges, and to develop more creative and dynamic approaches to societal challenges.</p>	<p><i>Working in partnership provides more efficient and better quality public services through increased innovative potential and technological transfer, acceleration of investment and better risk allocation, as well as improved operation of public administration by ensuring transparency of procedures.</i></p> <p><i>Partners keep you alert and innovative.</i></p>
<p>Institutional strengthening, capacity building and empowerment</p> <p>Through opportunities for building and improving strategic, operative and human capacity to overcome resources, size or skills limitations, those who are disadvantaged and/or marginalised can gain a stronger voice in the political arena and assume a more proactive role in addressing issues that affect them.</p>	<p><i>Partnership helps us to hear all voices, not just the strongest ones.</i></p> <p><i>Strong institutional partners can throw towing lines for less organised but more agile partners.</i></p>
<p>Legitimacy, stability and sustainability</p> <p>A more democratic policy 'mandate' is gained through broader stakeholder involvement, more participatory approaches to problem-solving and the generation of social capital. The inclusion of different organisations, groups and citizens in design, implementation and monitoring processes contributes to the durable and positive change that is the basis of a more cohesive society.</p>	<p><i>Effective partnerships leverage the strengths of each partner and apply them strategically to the issue at hand. It might take more work, and it might take longer, but strong partnerships build the relationships, shared understanding and collective focus to make lasting progress.</i></p> <p><i>Partnership allows 'experts by experience' to take ownership through processes that increase the effectiveness and sustainability of outcomes.</i></p>

provides an important global framework for collaborative action.¹⁰

The reasons for a focus on partnership in the ESIF have been well documented.¹¹ Table 2 summarises how working in partnership enables the funds to maximise their impact with endorsements from members of the Thematic Network on Partnership.

The term ‘partnership’, as the quotes above demonstrate, encompasses a range of dynamic relationships between diverse actors across different levels. This diversity is further reflected in interpretations of partnership across other EU programmes and funds, including, for example, partnership with private entities (LIFE);¹² Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) (Horizon 2020);¹³ and cooperation projects, cross-sectoral cooperation and cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices (Erasmus+).¹⁴

¹⁰ <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

¹¹ See: *Guidebook: How ESF Managing Authorities and Intermediate Bodies Support Partnership*, 2008.

¹² <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/>

¹³ <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/>

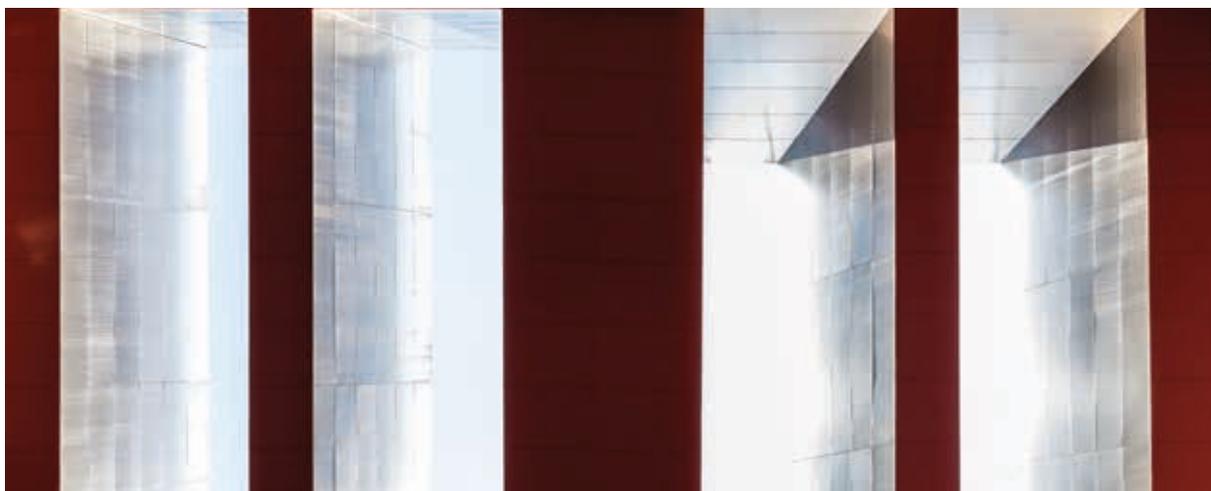
¹⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/node_en

As well as an instrument that assists the achievement of tangible outcomes for target groups and end users, partnership can also be understood as a process of working together that positively reinforces societal bonds and generates social capital. In addition, working in partnership may incorporate both formal and informal dimensions that are mutually reinforcing. Clear rules of engagement at programme level may thus be complemented by flexibility at project level for partners to decide how they would like to implement their work. This report aims to capture these different elements of partnership in relation to implementation of the ECCP.

Successful partnership is not only a tool or a format of work to achieve results, but an end in itself; a constant learning process in which the parties walk a path together based on common interests and different perspectives, all on the basis of the values of diversity, collaboration and mutual trust, key to the EU itself as a collective experience.



3. PARTNERSHIP IN THE CURRENT ESIF REGULATIONS (2014-20)



Source: Manuel Oliveros

The ESIF regulations for the 2014-20 programming period reinforce the importance of the partnership principle with calls for new and improved avenues for integrating stakeholder views into policy design and implementation, and the promotion of more robust connections between policy and practice. The **Common Provisions Regulation** (1303/2013) establishes guidelines for both Partnership Agreements and programmes across the ESIF. While stressing the importance of respect for the principles of subsidiarity, proportionality, and different institutional and legal frameworks, Partnership Agreements in each Member State are required to support an integrated approach to territorial development and alignment with the EU Growth Strategy ‘in cooperation with its partners, and in dialogue with the Commission’ (recital 20). Article 5 of the Regulation focuses on partnership and multi-level governance and calls for the inclusion in Partnership Agreements and programmes of representatives from ‘competent regional, local, urban and other public authorities, economic and social partners and other relevant bodies representing civil society, including environmental partners, non-governmental organisations and bodies responsible for promoting social inclusion, gender equality and non-discrimination, including, where appropriate, the umbrella organisations of such authorities and bodies’. The Commission also commits to sharing key principles and good practices that facilitate assessments of the implementation of partnership and its added value in Member States.

The partnership guidelines outlined in the Common Provisions Regulation are reinforced in the **European Code of Conduct on Partnership (ECCP)** (European Commission, 2014a). The ECCP is a delegated act which provides Member States with a tool that helps them organise their partnerships with the stakeholders involved in the implementation of the funds. The ECCP sets out common standards for partner involvement in ESIF Partnership Agreements and programme preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Reiterating the need for wider stakeholder involvement across national, regional and local levels to maximise the impact of funds, the key provisions of the ECCP include the adequate and appropriate representation of partners mentioned in Article 5 of the Common Regulation (see above) that take competence and capacity for active participation into account (Arts. 2-4). Consultation processes with relevant partners are to be conducted in an accessible and timely manner with clarity of information on involvement (Arts. 5-9). Membership rules and procedures for Monitoring Committees are outlined and a call is made for assessment of partner roles in partnership performance and effectiveness during the programming period (Arts. 10-16). Strengthening the institutional capacity of relevant partners is encouraged through capacity building activities that target social partners and civil society organisations involved in programmes (Art. 17). Finally, emphasis is placed on the importance of disseminating good practice examples and

exchanges of experience in order to promote learning about partnership across the ESIF. The vehicle proposed for this is a transnational thematic network on partnership (Art. 18).

Partnership is further reinforced in individual structural fund regulations. The **European Social Fund (ESF)** regulation (1304/2013) calls for the mobilisation of regional and local stakeholders to achieve the Europe 2020 Growth Strategy and its headline targets through mechanisms such as territorial pacts, local initiatives for employment and social inclusion, as well as sustainable and inclusive community-led local development strategies in urban and rural areas. The involvement of regional and local authorities, cities, social partners and non-governmental organisations is encouraged throughout the preparation and implementation of Operational Programmes (recital 23). As well as reinforcing the importance of partnership as a holistic approach across sectors, geographic and governance levels (recital 22), connections with social partners and non-governmental organisations are viewed as important for strategic governance of the ESF (recital 17). Emphasis is also placed on the promotion of social innovation in order to test, evaluate and scale up solutions to address social needs in partnership (Art. 9).

The **European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)** regulations (1301/2013) reinforce economic, social and territorial cohesion in the EU and the reduction of territorial imbalances between and within regions, rural and urban areas through sustainable development and structural adjustment of regional economies (recital 26). In Article 3 partnerships are situated as a vehicle for supporting this goal through networking, cooperation and exchange of experience between competent regional, local, urban and other public authorities, economic and social partners and relevant civil society organisations in studies, preparatory actions and capacity building. Territorial cohesion is further promoted by support for bottom-up local development strategies through Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) (European Commission, 2014c), ERDF-funded programmes such as URBACT III and other legal instruments and cooperation structures such as the European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC).¹⁵ Cohesion Policy also encourages regions and cities from different EU Member States to work together and learn

from each other through joint programmes, projects and networks.

The regulations for the **European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)** (1305/2013) call for co-operation among different actors in the agriculture sector, forestry sector and food chain to achieve rural development policy objectives and priorities (Art. 35). Networks, clusters and local action groups are emphasised as vital for supporting local development strategies (Art. 42). As well as a European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) with increased stakeholder membership, each Member State is also encouraged to establish a national rural network to improve the quality of rural development programme implementation and to foster innovation in agriculture, food production, forestry and rural areas (Arts. 52 & 54). In addition, a proposal is made for a European Innovation Partnership network of operational groups, advisory services and researchers to support agricultural productivity and sustainability (Art. 53).

The **European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF)** regulations (508/2014) place emphasis on CLLD which involves relevant representatives of public, private and civil society sectors (recital 58). The premise is that these local actors are best placed to design and implement multisectoral community-led local development strategies. Networking and cooperation between local partnerships is encouraged (recital 59) and emphasis is placed on EMFF support to Operational Programmes through Technical Assistance that promotes innovative approaches (recital 85). A call is also made for the establishment of a European network of Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGs) for capacity building, disseminating information, exchanging experience and supporting cooperation between local partnerships (recital 85).

The regulation for the **Cohesion Fund** (1300/2013) endorses complementarity and synergies between interventions supported by different funds so that duplication is avoided and solid infrastructure linkages are made at local, regional and national levels (recital 11). Strengthening the economic, social and territorial cohesion of the EU to promote sustainable development is reinforced (Art. 1) with calls for Partnership Agreements to support investment priorities that contribute to the EU Growth Strategy (Art. 4).

¹⁵ <https://portal.cor.europa.eu/egtc/Pages/welcome.aspx>



4. CHALLENGES TO APPLYING THE ECCP IN PRACTICE



Source: Manuel Oliveros

Findings from the ECCP review show that while a number of Managing Authorities have managed to embed the Code's partnership standards in their work, others have faced a range of problems in applying them. In addition to the challenges of promoting more robust connections between policy and practice, and stronger links to an overarching sustainability agenda, many difficulties are encountered during the process of working together, particularly as the investment of time and resources required for partnership to work well is underestimated. The key challenges encoun-

tered by respondents in implementing the ECCP are outlined in Table 3.

The challenges outlined below suggest that **understanding the risks and challenges of working collaboratively** and finding solutions for addressing them in order to build partnership arrangements that work efficiently and effectively, and offer added value to both partners and society at large require further attention. To do this, **improved identification and sharing of partnership practices that we can learn from** is essential.

Table 3: Partnership principle implementation challenges

Lack of awareness

Concern was expressed about the marked lack of awareness of the ECCP and its principles. This was largely attributed to the fact that the ECCP was finalised too late to fully inform the development of Partnership Agreements and Operational Programmes during the 2014-20 programming period. As a result, although there are notable exceptions, it was observed that in many Member States application of the ECCP has been translated into box-ticking efforts that show little more than compliance with regulations. The embedding of partnership principles in programmes and projects, the integration of informal as well as formal partnership dimensions, and systemic and holistic partnership approaches across the ESIF are thus limited.

The partnership principle is implemented in many Member States and Operational Programmes, but from the stakeholders' point of view the principle is not applied in a coherent and uniform way and is focused more on formal compliance and less on results.

High Level Group on Simplification

Although we have actively looked for good practice, it appears that, in general, NGOs are not familiar with the ECCP or how it is being implemented.

European Network on Independent Living (ENIL)

Limited flexibility and time

A number of respondents noted that flexibility is a challenge and that greater consideration of contextual variables is required for improved implementation of the ECCP. The issue of time, both in terms of lengthy decision-making processes, inadequate preparation for meetings and the development of meaningful connections between partners, was also viewed as a constraint.

One of the main challenges is the risk associated with major delays in the estimated time schedule for implementing a specific objective or a measure when it is not possible to reach an agreement within a reasonable time period.

Managing Authority, Latvia

The large amount of asylum-seekers in 2015 had an impact on the general discussion and created the need for new governmental strategies at all levels involving long-term cooperation among national, regional and local authorities. The circumstances placed a strain on stakeholders' partnership at national, regional and local level.

Programme Monitoring Committee Member, Sweden

In Monitoring Committees more time is needed to work through all the data and information concerning the agenda and content of each upcoming meeting, and in order for every member to form an opinion, especially when it comes to written procedures.

Programme Monitoring Committee, Greece

Weak representativeness

Many of the challenges highlighted around implementation of the ECCP relate to the absence of adequate participation channels for genuine stakeholder engagement in programme design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation. Particular concern was expressed about lack of diversity in selection of partners and the involvement of 'usual suspects' rather than 'non-traditional partners', including end users and local level stakeholders targeted by programmes, who might add new resources and perspectives to programmes and projects.

In the majority of countries, representatives of organisations of people with disabilities (DPOs) and people with disabilities themselves are rarely consulted on plans that are being developed (and which concern them), and this applies also for ESIF preparations.

ENIL

We need to enhance the strategic involvement of universities, and to strengthen partnership among regional stakeholders, as well as at different governance levels.

European University Association (EUA)

Managing Authorities don't tend to involve environmental NGOs in assessment of proposals, especially regarding the horizontal integration of sustainable development.

CEE Bankwatch, 2017

Often, the NGOs that participate are not representative of the whole sector and in some countries only a limited number of civil society representatives – those loyal to the government – were consulted on the allocation of ERDF/ESF funding.

Opening Doors for Europe's Children Campaign

Lack of transparency

Respondents noted that the terminology used in relation to partnership can be an impediment to full participation. It was further observed that accessible information channels and options for stakeholder engagement were often limited with weak connections and information flow between Managing Authorities and Monitoring Committee members, and between national, regional and local levels.

Monitoring Committee meetings contain material and data which is often of a technical and heavy going nature, with terms used without further explanation.

KL (Local Government Denmark)

The process for determining 'applicability' is not transparent, key sources of information about institutional care and community-based living are omitted from official guidance, and civil society is rarely involved in the process.

Crowther et al., 2017

<p>Weak ongoing involvement</p> <p>Meaningful stakeholder involvement is often lacking, particularly during programme implementation, and frameworks for regional and local engagement, as well as informal involvement, are poor. Moreover, many partners feel that they lack the information and skills needed to adequately pursue the establishment and maintenance of ‘good’ partnership connections.</p>	<p><i>Project-programme connections are strongest during preparation of Operational Programmes but much weaker during implementation – there is no framework for participation during this stage.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">ENIL</p> <p><i>Discussion and contribution of partners (especially NGOs) has not been as extensive as expected. For example, partners do not show great interest in attending the annual Monitoring Committee meeting. Feedback and comments were minimal and, during the last meeting, there was almost no discussion at all on actual themes.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Managing Authority, Estonia</p>
<p>Lack of support</p> <p>Not enough attention is given to factors that impede the full and appropriate participation of all partners and stakeholders in programmes and projects. Institutional strengthening and capacity-building efforts are often fragmented and there is a lack of investment in training and support facilities for working in partnership, and for generating meaningful connections between partners.</p>	<p><i>Many partners do not know how to partner; they lack the skills and knowledge to work effectively in this way which means that trust-building and real collaboration are often absent.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Social partner, Flanders (Belgium)</p> <p><i>More support is needed to strengthen partners’ institutional capacity so they can deal with their workload in relation to participation.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">CEE Bankwatch, 2017</p> <p><i>In order to make partnerships fair and sustainable, NGOs need to be provided with adequate capacity building as well as with resources to allow them to participate and provide valuable contributions.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">COFACE Families Europe</p>
<p>Poor assessment and review systems</p> <p>Effective systems of assessing and checking on the implementation of the partnership principle are generally absent. Participatory monitoring and evaluation systems that demonstrate the added value of working in partnership are impeded by lack of resources and/or access to appropriate methodologies and enhanced review systems.</p>	<p><i>Understanding of policy evaluation principles, especially when it comes to impacts, varies a lot. EU documentation concerning these matters could be much clearer.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Programme Monitoring Committee Member, Sweden</p> <p><i>Better assessment of what works and what does not work is needed for the specificities of each Member State.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Managing Authority/Programme Monitoring Committee, Luxembourg</p>
<p>Limited exchange of learning</p> <p>Efforts to promote dynamic exchanges of learning about working in partnership across multiple levels have not received full attention. A particular challenge is finding ways to make a stronger impact at policy level.</p>	<p><i>There is no systematic way of learning across different levels. Policy level learning connections require particular attention.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">ESF Flanders</p> <p><i>Much valuable learning is lost from past experiences to the extent that we are constantly reinventing this. Local level learning is also absent and there is too much emphasis on positive practices. We need more on challenges, problems and failures.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">REVES</p> <p><i>Learning connections are highly dependent on individuals and need to be more institutionalised.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">ENIL</p>



5. IMPROVING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ECCP



Source: Manuel Oliveros

Partnership is essential if you want to obtain real results in the labour market. It is the oil that makes the motor turn smoothly.

ESF Flanders

Partnership must continue to be an underlying principle of EU cohesion policy and be strengthened further, given the positive results it can achieve in the use of ESIF and contribution to higher acceptance and accuracy in use of structural funds.

Business Europe, 2017

The European Code of Conduct on Partnership has proved to be useful for the implementation of regional programmes supported by ESIF. For the next ESIF programming period, the European Commission should consider providing a set of tools, such as contract templates, good practice manuals, checklists, etc., which could facilitate the implementation of the partnership principle.

EUA

We need to make the ECCP a living dynamic document that reflects reality on ground and is less rigid.

REVES

In the current funding period, the ECCP has been published too late. For the next funding period, the ECCP should be available and valid before Member States start working on their Partnership Agreements and Operational Programmes.

German Welfare Organisations

The usefulness of the ECCP was confirmed by all respondents involved in our review. In addition to the importance of representation in decision-making processes at different levels, many noted that **the ECCP has reinforced the importance of working**

in cooperation to address Europe's development challenges.

Respondents also agreed that **the partnership principle, and its endorsement in the ECCP, should be**

continued and strengthened further in the next programming period by including specific provisions in the new Common Provisions Regulation for ESIF. This focus was seen as essential for ensuring the cohesion, ownership and long-term commitment outlined by the European Semester and the European Pillar of Social Rights, as well as to support a wider sustainable development agenda integrating economic growth, social progress and environmental protection. To facilitate this process, many respondents stated that **increased endeavours should be made to raise awareness of the ECCP, facilitate its implementation and strengthen the transfer of learning about partnership practices across Member States.**

Review feedback suggested that, an **updated and reinvigorated ECCP** with an emphasis on ‘doing more with better partnerships’ is needed. As well as a **more vibrant depiction of the added value of working in partnership**, meaningful examples of how partnership works in practice were called for from both programme and project perspectives in different contexts. It was also requested that the **revised ECCP should also be available in good time** so that its guidance is fully integrated in the forthcoming programme round (2021-27).

While there is ongoing debate about the extent to which implementation of the ECCP should be mandatory, respondents confirmed the importance of an emphasis on the **quality of implementation of partnership principle** and the **inclusion of the perspectives, knowledge and experience of diverse stakeholders in an ongoing manner throughout programme cycles.**

5.1 Cross-level connections

There is a need for a deeper understanding of the ECCP in relation to the European Social Fund and the ESIF as a whole.

Programme Monitoring Committee Member, Sweden

Our experience of over 25 years of partnership and collaboration in the Republic of Ireland, has shown links between the connections established, the emergence of learning and trust and the ability of organisations and individuals to change the ways in which they work.

Pobal

I want measures regarding sustainable growth to ensure that ecological sustainability is a central task when developing partnership and practical work in different funds.

Programme Monitoring Committee Member, Sweden

The richness of partnership can be enhanced by including a multi-sectoral approach, involving public sector, civil society organisations as well as businesses. This way, the exercise of partnership expands and brings a space for social innovation and commitment by parties which, in principle, have a different logic. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Sustainability strategies are fields which can bring an interesting common ground. The 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals promote multi-sectoral partnerships, and advantage should be taken of this framework.

Fundación ONCE

As well as **greater efforts to connect different funds, institutional levels, sectors and policy arenas**, it was also noted that, in view of the increasing importance of the global sustainable development agenda, the **better integration of social, economic and environmental perspectives** in partnership approaches, proposals and projects is necessary.

PRACTICES TO LEARN FROM Promoting cross-level connections

The T-model in Germany

In Germany, the system is set up to create links between project, programme and policy levels via a T-model that combines horizontal partnerships at federal level with vertical partnerships initiated at federal level but addressing regional and local levels. Two key federal level programmes support this: **Rückenwind** for personal and structural development of the social economy, including member organisations of the Federal Association of Non-statutory Welfare and other non-profit organisations (BAFGW) and **Fachkräfte sichern – Gleichstellen fördern** for social partners and representatives of equal opportunity organisations. Both have Steering Groups that operate

formally and enhance the commitment of different stakeholders by incorporating their contributions and viewpoints. Stakeholders are actively involved in programme monitoring and decision-making procedures at horizontal level and participate in agreement on the wording of operations and procedures; as well as consultancy structures for applicants (Regiustellen), and establishment of Steering Committees for project selection, working rules, decision-making procedures and monitoring, etc.

Cross-level coordination in Luxembourg

In Luxembourg, in response to the ECCP, a committee to regroup ESIF was set up with representatives from the Ministry of Economy (European Regional Development Fund/ERDF), the Ministry of Labour (ESF), the Ministry of Sustainable Development (INTERREG) and the Ministry of Agriculture (European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development/EAFRD). The objective of the committee is to coordinate the strategies and priorities for each fund, to follow up on them and to exchange on implementation and programming. In this way complementarity is promoted between the different funds and alignment with national and European policies. Special attention is also paid to administrative and financial management whilst avoiding any overlaps or possible double financing. Furthermore, in order to streamline the work of the structural funds and ensure transparency, a common website has been created that groups the following funds: ERDF, ESF, EAFRD, Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) and Internal Security Fund (ISF). The objective of centralising all information and new developments regarding the funds is to facilitate access for all partners and beneficiaries as well as the authorities dealing with the funds on an everyday basis.

See: <http://www.fonds-europeens.public.lu/fr/index.html>

Structural Fund Partnerships in Sweden

In Sweden, strong synergies have been developed between the ESF and the ERDF, as well as with other programmes, to reinforce a complementary approach that focuses on regional needs. Structural Fund Partnerships (SFPs) are established by a law that stipulates their composition and tasks. Municipal and regional politicians must form more than 50% of SFP membership. The chairperson is appointed by government and designates remaining members of the SFP in accordance with the principles laid down by government. Social partners, NGOs, universities and public authorities

(such as county councils and administrative and labour boards) are officially recognised members of the SFPs which act as selection bodies for ‘cooperation projects’ operating at multiple levels.

Disability, partnership and active involvement in EU funding, Fundación ONCE in Spain

Established in Spain in 1988 by ONCE (National Organisation of the Blind), Fundación ONCE aims to improve the quality of life, inclusion and equal opportunities of people with disabilities, with a special focus on training, employment and accessibility of products, services and environments. Through its board members it has strong links with all the main organisations working for people with disabilities in Spain, including CERMI (the Spanish Committee of Representatives of People with Disabilities) and currently takes part in the Operational Programme on Social Inclusion and Social Economy, and the Operational Programme on Youth Employment, both as an Intermediate Body and as a beneficiary. The organisation’s collaborative approach and its insistence on a gender perspective in programme management, has enabled it to reach a wider audience, particularly for people with disabilities with special difficulties in joining the job market. Since 2000, almost 275,000 people with disabilities have been reached by Fundación ONCE’s ESF Programmes; some 100,000 have been trained and almost 77,000 have found a job, an average 45% of these being women with disabilities. Fundación ONCE plays a central role in ESF transnational cooperation. From 2009-15, it led **InNet16** (European Observatory for Structural Funds and Disability), the European Network on Inclusive Education and Disability (**includ-ed**) and the European Network for Corporate Social Responsibility and Disability (**CSR+D**). These transnational initiatives involved 31 organisations from 13 countries, representing public authorities, companies and civil society. Fundación ONCE’s current transnational activity is conducted under the **Disability4EU2020** umbrella strategy and involves leading initiatives on social economy and disability in the EU; the promotion of more inclusive job markets, and, as a continuation of the European Network on CSR and Disability, the **Disability Hub Europe for Sustainable Growth and Social Innovation** (DHub) which focuses on the disability:sustainability dimension in the UN 2030 agenda and Sustainable Development Goals. their goals.

5.2 Balancing accountability and flexibility

Partnership should be about thinking out of the box rather than ticking the box.

Thematic Network on Partnership

The next ECCP could be more flexible and adapted to the specificities of the Member State in question.

Programme Monitoring Committee, Luxembourg

Flexibility at Member State level is important – it's better to give partners the opportunity to be involved rather than, for example, force partners to confirm different reports.

Programme Monitoring Committee, Estonia

To implement the partnership principle more meaningfully, many respondents felt that an **improved balance between compliance with rules and procedures and the flexibility to generate different partnership solutions in specific and changing contexts** should be promoted. In this way partners and target groups will be able to contribute more creatively to the achievement of positive change.

PRACTICES TO LEARN FROM Balancing accountability and flexibility

Strengthening different forms of partnership, REVES

REVES is a network of European cities and regions working to develop innovative models for strengthening partnership and good governance between local authorities and social economy. Established in 1996, REVES began as a laboratory to develop and refine techniques for partnership at all levels (decision-making, programming, projecting and implementing). This has enabled it to develop mechanisms which have positively influenced local policy and partnership processes. Within the network, public authorities and social economy platforms share roles but also accept their differences, reflecting the fact that a partnership is more than the sum of different objectives or a composition of different interests,

and is solid when partners develop common ground – a shared vision and shared values – and identify a common objective to pursue. The REVES governance model is a mix of hard instruments, such as statutory prescriptions, and soft instruments, such as the customs that develop in daily relationships. The general rule for decision-making is consensus, while voting by majority is the exception. This involves the need for discussion and reaching a common perspective on specific issues. In terms of customs, the flux of information and the involvement in any activity are key features. This does not mean that all the partnership members always participate in any activity but that the whole partnership has elements and possibilities for always being able to participate. The REVES partnership has enabled the building of common political positions, common methodologies for implementing a common vision, concrete actions (at the local level) and the pursuit of a direct impact on quality of life.

See: <http://www.revesnetwork.eu/>

Promoting flexibility in Flanders (Belgium)

In Flanders the Operational Programme is designed so that it can be used in a flexible way to launch calls that are relevant to the Flemish labour market. The Operational Programme is kept 'open' in order to take into account the thematic concentration and priorities of the EU 2020 strategy. It also aims to ensure that it does not 'block' target groups and actions with too many details at the micro level. The Monitoring Committee, together with government and social partners, ensure that calls can be formulated in a flexible way so that they are adapted to current challenges. Most projects in Flanders have a duration of just two years. This flexibility gives government and social partners the possibility of 'rapid' intervention by adapting calls, e.g. in the 2007-13 planning period, ESF projects were able to realise tripartite agreements such as the Work and Investment Programme, Competencies Agenda and Job Agreement, between the Flemish government and social partners to tackle the crisis and create more job opportunities.

Accountable Autonomy in Ireland

In Ireland, partnership arrangements explicitly state and guarantee the principle of 'Accountable Autonomy' which enables partner organisations to balance their commitments to the communities that they serve with full accountability to funders. This offers the opportunity

for needs to be met locally while responding to national policies and priorities, maximising impact and minimising waste and duplication.

5.3 Representativeness

The key to success is to properly identify the needs of the target groups. It might be seen as an additional burden, but it can prevent problems with spending and lead to a decrease in necessary changes and time to work on the call for proposals.

Programme Monitoring Committee Member,
Slovakia

There should be a continuous reflection on who are the right partners on different matters. The challenge is to reach partners that are key for the partnership but are largely invisible for policy-makers.

COFACE Families Europe

Dialogue with the representatives of municipalities and provinces should be better used to take advantage of their communication channels and reach a greater number of local entities.

ESF Spain

The European Commission, Member States and Managing Authorities should ensure a clearly defined role and status for social partner organisations in the context of ESF implementation, as part of a renewed code of conduct on Partnership.

European social partners (2018)

A number of respondents suggested that the meaning of representativeness and who decides on who is being represented should be made clearer. There were also demands for the encouragement of greater diversity in partner selection with procedures for including different partners. The active involvement of the following stakeholders was specifically mentioned:

- Social partners – players representing the world of work and jobs with particular efforts to engage better with actors such as small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs) and social economy enterprises

- Academic, research and other educational institutions – special mention was made of the importance of enhancing the strategic involvement of universities
- Civil society organisations – representing environmental issues and groups such as youth, people with disabilities and migrants, as well as non-traditional actors representing the most vulnerable and marginalised, and end users
- Networks, coalitions and partnerships – focusing on specific areas relevant for the investment priorities chosen, particularly at local level
- Gender equality and non-discrimination bodies

To ensure that critical voices are not excluded, a call was made for attention to the impartiality and independence of the civil society organisations involved. In addition, a number of respondents noted that greater consideration should be given to the relevance, timing and ‘fit’ of diverse inputs in different contexts and programme phases, with selection based on the most appropriate partners for particular themes and focus areas.

PRACTICES TO LEARN FROM Improving representativeness

Involving environmental organisations in Operational Programmes in Slovakia

In Slovakia, two working groups were created by the Managing Authority of the Operational Programme Quality of Environment (OPQoE) to involve environmental NGOs and other experts in the preparation of calls for proposals. The Central Coordination Authority developed rules for the implementation and preparation of Law No. 292/2014 where NGOs directly contributed to the drafting process via the ESIF Implementation Management/Financial Management System. Cooperation of NGO experts with Managing Authorities and the Office of Plenipotentiary for the development of civil society in the Operational Programme for Effective Public Administration (OPEVS) on preparation of calls for proposals was also carried out in a participative manner. This cooperation continues through high-quality information seminars and monitoring processes.

Integrating gender equality in the Operational Programme in Estonia

In Estonia, stakeholder consultation for the Operational Programme preparation process included efforts to

ensure involvement of the Ministry of Social Affairs as the entity responsible for social inclusion, gender equality and non-discrimination issues. The Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner was also involved as the relevant supervisory authority and organised, on its own initiative, training events on gender mainstreaming for public officials involved in drawing up the programmes of European Structural and Investment Funds. This training was well received and valued by the public servants of the ministries. The Estonia Equality Body was also recognised as a relevant partner in the context of the preparation of the new programmes. Due to the transversal aspect of gender and non-discrimination issues, the different ministries in charge of drafting the Operational Programmes initially considered that the Equality Body was not a partner for reference. Gender equality was registered in the area of social affairs (each ministry had its own list of organisations), which limited the legitimacy of discussing other fields. A strong advocacy strategy had to be developed in order to address this. As a result the Equality Body managed to obtain recognition as a real partner, including by the Finance Ministry. The participation process established on paper then became a reality. A commission is now reviewing all Operational Programmes in the light of gender.

See: www.strukturifondid.ee/kaasamise-etapid/

Deepening engagement with the most deprived in Germany

In Germany, a partnership approach has been used to implement the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD). The leading Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs set up a Monitoring Committee in which all relevant partners – municipalities, welfare organisations, migrants' organisations, NGOs for homeless people, etc. are involved. The partners are included in the preparation of all documents (Operational Programme, guidelines, FAQ, etc.) as well as programme evaluation. All projects under FEAD funding have to be implemented by a consortium with a municipality and a welfare/migrants' organisation. FEAD's focus on highly deprived people ensures that help and advice are available for those who are not eligible for ESF funding because they are viewed as being too far away from the labour market. Experiences with FEAD in Germany are very positive as an important and growing group of deprived persons can be targeted through regional networks.

Activating Monitoring Committee membership in Romania

In Romania, the government set up Monitoring Committees for the implementation of ERDF and ESF funds, and in accordance with the methodology and functioning of the committees, at least 40% of the members are representatives of civil society, academia, and social partners. Round tables, seminars and workshops are organised to facilitate networking, communication and monitoring of the programmes (implementation per se and monitoring of results and spending), as well as promotion of good practices and field visits. This methodology guarantees the involvement of civil society during all stages of ESIF planning: consultations on producing the guide for applicants, assessment criteria, developing the annual implementation report, monitoring the performance scorecard, and identifying potential problem areas.

See: http://www.openingdoors.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/MSE_Publication_15032018_web.pdf

5.4 Transparency and accessibility

One major discussion among the members of the Monitoring Committee in 2017 has been a better description of the role, expectations and responsibilities assigned to its members... In the same way that the roles and functions of the members in the Monitoring Committee are being clarified, the role of the partners in the implementation of the Partnership Agreement should be further clarified (or the Monitoring Committee should get a clearer picture of how the partnership's roles are built and how they work), in order to strengthen the performance and effectiveness of the partnership and possible synergies with the work performed by the Monitoring Committee.

Programme Monitoring Committee, Sweden

It would be a big help if technical terms were explained further in order to gain better insight into the specific framework of Structural Fund administration.

KL (Local Government Denmark)

It was observed that greater transparency and accessibility are needed to ensure that educational and other barriers that might be an impediment to engagement are carefully considered. Calls were also made for more transparent decision-making processes with clearer language and guidance around timeframes, expectations and opportunities for partner input. Various stakeholders noted that Managing Authorities should be able to demonstrate that diverse views have been taken into account and explain why a particular decision or action has been taken. Furthermore, in addition to rules of procedure for the composition of Monitoring Committees, a need for more clarity on rules of engagement and access to information on how to participate more fully in review processes was expressed.

PRACTICES TO LEARN FROM Promoting transparency and accessibility

Involving stakeholders in programmes and projects in Flanders (Belgium)

The principle of partnership is very important in Flanders. For the writing of the Operational Programme all important stakeholders in the Flemish labour market are involved. Using a range of participative methods, stakeholders are brought together to talk about the challenges of the Flemish labour market and how they can be included in the Operational Programme. Stakeholders are also involved during implementation of the calls. For instance, advance talks are held with technical staff before a call is launched in order to ensure clarity among project promoters and selected stakeholders, including umbrella organisations. The Flemish ESF Managing Authority organises visits with project promoters on a regular basis (*ESF stapt af*). ESF Flanders sees itself as a partner in each project and believes that it is very important to know what project promoters think and what improvements they want to see. During the mid-term period, ESF Flanders organises ‘captain tables’ where they talk with all stakeholders in order to assess satisfaction with the Operational Programme and cooperation with the ESF. ESF Flanders also promotes partnership at project level. In several calls partnership is obligatory and partnership is encouraged among project promoters during thematic sessions and interventions among project promoters.

Involving civil society organisations in Slovakia

In Slovakia, preparations for post-2020, including consultations with civil society organisations, have started early and working groups have been formed. There have also been improvements regarding the procedures and rules of the Monitoring Committees by offering more opportunities for NGOs to influence Operational Programmes through the new law for a more balanced voting system (Law 292/2014) in which, via an amendment promoted by NGOs, non-state actors can outvote state representatives on controversial issues. Each Monitoring Committee also involves more than one NGO representative with voting rights.

Clear NGO representation in the Czech Republic

In the Czech Republic, the selection procedure for NGO representatives in the partnership process is regarded by NGOs as transparent and clear. The selection procedure was conducted through cooperation between the EU Committee, the Government Council for NGOs and the ESIF 2014-2020 programming platform, an ad-hoc informal group which nominated NGO representatives on the basis of motivation letters and letters of recommendation from other NGOs.

Using an operational platform in Greece

In Greece, decisions and conclusions are published on the operational platform *Diavlos*, an important tool for the implementation of consultation procedures (‘written procedure’ of Monitoring Committees). This tool ensures rapid compliance with information and communication demands so that partners are well-informed and able to express their opinion or ‘vote’ on the issues uploaded. The *Diavlos* platform is an intranet application through which members of Operational Programme Monitoring Committees are informed of all actions uploaded for consultation and specialisation, and are able to ‘approve’ these actions so that Managing Authorities can activate them. They may make comments and suggestions or give an opinion on any Operational Programme amendment proposed by the Managing Authority and can make observations to the Managing Authority regarding implementation and evaluation of the Operational Programme.

5.5 Ongoing involvement

Good partnerships need work: partners need to nurture their relationships in between meetings.

Pobal

Partnership is not the same as consultation – it is about openness from all sides and avoidance of tokenism.

Thematic Network on Partnership

Civil society should contribute to all stages of the ESIF cycle including planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation in a transparent and structured way.

Crowther et al. 2017

Explicit mention of the need for **ongoing involvement** in all phases of programme development was called for. In addition to involving partners more fully in the preparation of the Partnership Agreements, Operational Programmes and calls for proposals, and in Monitoring Committees, respondents noted that deeper partner engagement is particularly necessary during implementation. Some suggested that participation of relevant partners and stakeholders should be foreseen when governments are designing specific strategies required to fulfil ex-ante conditionalities. Respondents also stressed that **involvement of partners must go beyond consultation** and that concerted efforts are needed to integrate the local voice in programme cycles through place-based, bottom-up and participative approaches such as Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) and co-production.

PRACTICES TO LEARN FROM Ensuring ongoing involvement

Reinforcing programme and project connections in Ireland

In Ireland, ongoing programme connections are promoted formally through the ESF Programme Monitoring Committee, a 30-member group representing social partners, regional assemblies and representatives of all Operational Programmes. Members are carefully selected to reflect the Irish employment situation with a focus on representation and inclusive decision-making.

The Programme Monitoring Committee has links with the ERDF and also draws on strong social partnership traditions, including a vast web of informal connections with civil society organisations that deliver many services at local level with local government via Local and Community Development Committees and Local Development Companies which have social partners on board and a strong business development orientation.

NGO Monitoring Committee involvement in Bulgaria

In Bulgaria, the National Network for Children (NNC) – the Opening Doors national coordinator in Bulgaria – is a member of the Monitoring Committee of the Human Resources Development Operational Programme. The positive consequences of participation in the Monitoring Committee include contributions to: texts related to deinstitutionalisation and other child rights issues in the Partnership Agreement; the Good Governance Operational Programme in relation to concrete commitments and funding for capacity-building of NGOs and civil society; the Human Rights Development Operational Programme in terms of wording related to deinstitutionalisation, and improving specific operations important to the work of member organisations of the National Network for Children in Bulgaria, such as particular texts and opportunities for including NGOs. A specific example concerns the area of foster care, where the National Network for Children was included in a Consultative Expert Council.

See: http://www.openingdoors.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/MSE_Publication_15032018_web.pdf

Going beyond consultation at project level in Estonia

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Estonian local event series Garage48 jointly organised the project **Estonian Wellbeing 2017**. In the project participants looked for new innovative solutions for problems in the Estonian social sphere. Anybody could participate and experienced social sector specialists, medical experts, representatives of local governments and technical mentors helped develop their ideas into solutions at the ‘hackathon’. In the first stage social and medical experts were invited to brainstorming sessions all over Estonia to look at the current situation and gather ideas. In the second stage, more than 80 people came together to be mentored by 10 professionals and specialists. The aim was to come up with a prototype which would solve problems relating to social care, medicine, childcare and

other important topics. Ten bright ideas were pitched, seven of which managed to find a team that continued to work with the idea.

See: <http://garage48.org/blog/idea-garage-estonian-wellbeing-2017-kicked-off-with-great-energy>

Community-Led Local Development (CLLD)

Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) is a methodology used in rural areas of Europe to engage local actors in the design and delivery of strategies for the development of their areas with co-financing from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). The central plank of CLLD is to encourage local people to develop local partnerships in which they design and implement an integrated development strategy that builds upon local assets. CLLD is based on the application of seven key principles:

- An area-based approach to ensure that funding is concentrated in a clearly defined area with specific problems
- A bottom-up approach in which the local community identifies the needs and challenges faced in its area, and proposes solutions and defines projects to address these
- An integrated approach that includes different actors and sectors working together with a single strategy
- Partnerships involving key actors from the public, private and civil society sectors working together in Local Action Groups (LAGs)
- Innovative approaches that encourage the application of new solutions in an area
- Cooperation between LAGs
- Networking and peer-learning exchanges to connect the knowledge and experience derived from CLLD across Europe

A dedicated investment priority on CLLD has been established in the ESF for the current programming period, and 13 Member States have selected it. Some of them, including Sweden and Poland, will allow it to be integrated with other ESI Funds within the same local strategy.

See: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/informat/2014/community_en.pdf

Co-production

Co-production is a methodology that promotes continuous, flexible and collaborative ways of promoting improved governance and the development of quality public services by tailoring initiatives for and with different

groups of citizens. The principles of co-production include recognition of people as assets; the promotion of reciprocity; endorsement of the value of working differently, and the building of social networks (Griffiths, 2016). These principles have been applied in a variety of different settings in Europe, e.g. in the Neue Nachbarn Arnsberg (New Neighbours Arnsberg) refugee-led initiative working with German municipalities to co-develop innovative approaches to integration, participation and urban development; the development of Scotland's Social Enterprise Strategy (2016-26); collaborative local government in Amersfoort, Netherlands, and experimental work undertaken by the Social Innovation Community (SIC) to co-create solutions for local challenges in cities in Croatia, Estonia, Italy and Norway.

See: <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/content/co-production-dossier-explains-co-trends>

5.6 Capacity building and institutional strengthening

Capacity building should focus much more on partner responsibilities and, where necessary, on trust building and learning how to cooperate with strongly differing and divided partners.

Social partner, Flanders (Belgium)

There are weak incentives for public organisations, municipalities and state agencies to cooperate with third sector actors because of unclear juridical conditions, public procurement regulations, etc. In consequence, support aiming to strengthen the capacity of third sector actors should also be directed to public organisations.

Programme Monitoring Committee member, Sweden

In order to improve the implementation of the of the Code of Conduct, and to fully realise the benefits of an efficient partnership, further efforts are clearly needed by Managing Authorities to enable timely access to all relevant information, involving NGO delegates better in strategic discussions and decision making processes, and increasing the capacity of stakeholders.

CEE Bankwatch, 2017

Managing Authorities, European Commission and social partners could look at the topic of providing social partner members of Monitoring Committees with training, expert input and advice and guidance, as necessary.

European social partners, 2018

A considerable number of respondents noted that efforts need to be made to improve the advice, guidance and capacity of different stakeholders to work together in partnership, particularly in terms of learning how to cooperate with very different partners. To do this, partnership skills training was proposed for Managing Authorities, partners and stakeholders. In addition, both NGOs and social partner representatives called for the strengthening of institutional capacity, through Technical Assistance as well as other relevant means, for partners unable to contribute effectively to ESIF programmes and projects due to lack of resources, skills, confidence or adequate time. The importance of ensuring clarity around capacity building in the next programming period was reinforced, especially if the thematic objective of enhancing the institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders is not included in the new regulations.

PRACTICES TO LEARN FROM Supporting partner engagement

Training on the partnership principle in Latvia

In Latvia training was offered in 2017 to increase knowledge and expertise on implementation of the partnership principle in ESIF programmes and projects in the period 2014-2020. The training of participants from Latvian public administration agencies and NGOs was undertaken as part of the 'Provision of training services to institutions of Latvia involved in the management of the European Union Funds' scheme and was developed as a series of lectures, discussions, workshops, interactive group and individual exercises, as well as analyses of relevant case studies and sessions aimed at exchange of experiences. The European Institute of Public Administration supervised the training, in liaison with DG EMPL.

Intermediate Body support for partnership in Ireland

In Ireland, Pobal provides partnerships with developmental and Technical Assistance as well as guidance on organisational management and governance and specialist training around specific issues. This can include provision of information material on programme target groups, feedback on performance and strategies, or training inputs and discussions designed to address specific areas of challenge within the work. A liaison system in which Pobal officers service partnerships by attending board and management meetings, also provides useful support to projects as they develop. In addition, events are organised as required at regional and national levels for key partnership staff and board members.

Using Technical Assistance to support civil society development in Slovakia

The Office of the Plenipotentiary supported a one-year pilot project for the development of civil society with funding from the Operational Programme's Technical Assistance. This is first ever case of an Operational Programme using Technical Assistance to cover the costs of non-state experts performing work on participation, partnership and transparency in ESIF monitoring and implementation.

Sector support in England

In England, it was agreed that some Technical Assistance could be available directly for the third sector so that NGOs could participate fully in programmes 25 years ago. In order to provide support in developing networks, Technical Assistance was also made available to infrastructure organisations, to support specific sectors, so that partnership working could be delivered. This was developed through programmes during the funding periods 1994-99, 2000-06 and 2007-13 and enabled partners to be funded to support programmes, as appropriate, as well as develop knowledge and understanding of programmes within different sectors. Technical Assistance funded organisations were referred to as Sector Co-ordinators who worked closely with the Managing Authority. When there were large bidding rounds with many small bids they ran training sessions for their sectors so that there was a wider understanding of what the ESF was for, the strategies, and what could be done at sector and programme levels. In some programmes, Sector Co-ordinators did first-stage checks of bids before packaging them and sending them on to the Managing Authority, so speeding up the process.

5.7 Review and assessment

The European Commission could do something as simple as to ask Managing Authorities to systematically report about the concrete use of the partnership principle in the implementation of measures.

REVES

A system for monitoring the implementation of ECCP is needed that involves civil society organisations.

ENIL

We need different kinds of partnership reviews, including inspiring stories and examples that share the added value of working in partnership at different levels.

ESF Flanders

Review and assessment processes that involve stakeholders more proactively and appropriately were called for, with many noting that the European Commission should be fully represented in Monitoring Committees. Respondents recommended that Monitoring Committees should discuss annual implementation reports with stakeholders and published them online for comments. Implementation reports should also share information on how ex-ante conditionalities have been fulfilled and underpin programmes. It was also suggested that learning from review processes should be fed back more coherently into practice with better reporting on the added value of working in partnership in different contexts and at different levels.

PRACTICES TO LEARN FROM Improving assessment and review processes

EC involvement in the Programme Monitoring Committee in Flanders (Belgium)

In Flanders the EC is always involved in the Monitoring Committee and is thus able to share its knowledge and learn how the Flemish Operational Programme works. As well as involvement in all major events, ESF Flanders organises an annual day for the EC where its representatives can visit projects and engage with what is happening in the field.

A live programme monitoring system in Ireland

A live IT, planning and monitoring system has been developed for the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) which is co-financed by the ESF and the Government of Ireland. The programme implementers and local government aligned contracting authorities (Local Community Development Committees) use the system. This requires them to input data on their progress at regular intervals. This system, coupled with oversight by case workers from the Intermediate Body, Pobal, which is responsible for administering the programme, ensures that problems are picked up early and addressed rapidly. It is also made clear that non-compliance will be sanctioned. Such a system offers an interesting model for ESF Operational Programmes.

Partnership Peer Reviews in England

In England (UK) 'Peer Review Quality Statements' were developed for Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) established after 2000. The peer review tool was established to help partnerships undertake a self-assessment with peers in a constructive and supportive environment. The reviews were conducted by teams drawn from a number of LSPs and each lasted one day. LSP members, such as local authority members and officers, public, private voluntary and community sector stakeholders worked together in a panel that visited a particular partnership as 'critical friends' in order to explore their performance. They used quality statements as a guide to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the partnership which were grouped into 'strategic', 'inclusive', 'action-focused', 'performance managed', 'efficient' and 'learning and development' characteristics. The process offered an excellent learning opportunity for all involved and also developed informal networks between partnerships.

See: <https://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/37728868.pdf>

5.8 Exchange and learning

It should be a goal that during the next period we start better sharing of experiences and views.

Programme Monitoring Committee Member,
Sweden

Being in a partnership can provide valuable sources of information and learning. The process of dialogue can really help partners to understand one another's perspectives – this also helps to build credibility for what you are ultimately trying to change/improve.

Pobal

In addition to commitment from the European Commission and Member States, several comments were received regarding the responsibility of all stakeholders to **improve exchange and learning** about the application of the partnership principle. More proactive information exchange within, between and across multiple levels and funds was viewed as necessary for this. Beyond simply making good practices available, respondents stated that ways to learn more strategically from partnership successes and failures should be encouraged through measures such as training and peer reviews, and that there should be a much stronger focus on using the knowledge obtained to inform and improve future developments. Mention was also made of the need to recover, adapt and make available relevant partnership guidance and learning materials developed during previous programming periods.

PRACTICES TO LEARN FROM Facilitating exchange and learning

ESF Transnational Platform

The ESF Transnational Platform was established by the European Commission in 2015. The Platform, which is managed by AEIDL, encompasses nine thematic networks and facilitates coordinated calls for proposals. It also publishes articles, a newsletter and technical dossiers, and organises seminars and conferences. Mutual learning is at the core of the work of the thematic networks which focus on: Employment, Governance and Public Administration, Inclusion, Learning and Skills, Migrants, Partnership, Simplification, Social Economy and Youth Employment. Each network is normally led by a Member State and benefits from the assistance of a thematic expert. The networks carry on activities such as workshops, peer reviews and site visits, and are involved in developing case studies, guidelines, toolkits and other resources that assist transnational collaboration and learning.

See: <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/transnationality/>

EURoma Network

The EURoma network brings together national public authorities responsible for Roma inclusion policies (mainly National Roma Contact Points) and those responsible for ESI Funds (Managing Authorities and Intermediate Bodies) from 15 EU Member States. It aims to improve the use of ESI Funds for the promotion of the social inclusion, equal opportunities and fight against discrimination of the Roma community. Over the past 11 years, this innovative model of horizontal cooperation has consolidated a transnational coordination structure that reinforces the partnership principle by involving key stakeholders working together for the inclusion of the Roma population (those in charge of policies and those in charge of EU funding). The network has also made an important contribution to building capacity by promoting mutual learning and sharing knowledge, strategies and approaches in the use of ESI Funds for Roma inclusion. EURoma also aims to generate knowledge on key issues related to the use of ESI Funds for Roma inclusion, building upon the experience and shared approaches of network partners and the work and debate within the network.

See: <https://www.euromanet.eu/>

The National Thematic Group on Partnership in Sweden

The Swedish ESF Council initiated and supported research and development work on partnerships and cooperation through the National Thematic Group (NTG) on Partnership. The NTG on Partnership was established to gather and disseminate experiences from the EQUAL programme and later worked to share knowledge about partnerships more widely through interactive research, regular work group meetings, participation in conferences, and the development of papers, publications and a web page. Close contact with the Swedish ESF Council, at both leadership and employee level, ensured that NTG experiences were taken into consideration at Operational Programme level through dialogue with programme writers, and the principle of openness and honesty was promoted in the network to ensure that different opinions were equally valued.

See: Guidebook: How ESF Managing Authorities and Intermediate Bodies Support Partnership, pp. 66–68.



6. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS



Source: Manuel Oliveros

6.1 A revised ECCP

The focus on partnership, and its endorsement in the ECCP, is welcomed and should be continued and strengthened further in the next programming period by including specific provisions in the new Common Provisions Regulation on ESIF.

A reinvigorated ECCP with an emphasis on ‘doing more with better partnerships’ is needed for this. As well as a **more vibrant depiction of the added value of working in partnership**, meaningful examples of how partnership works in practice should be shared from both programme and project perspectives in different contexts. The **revised ECCP should also be available in good time** so that its guidance can be fully integrated in the forthcoming programme round (2021-27).

As well as reinforcing the importance of **quality in the implementation of partnership principles** and the **inclusion of the perspectives, knowledge and experience of diverse stakeholders in an ongoing manner throughout programme cycles**, the ECCP should emphasise the need for better connections between different funds, institutional levels, sectors and policy arenas. The cohesion, ownership and long-term commitment necessary for Europe’s future should also make reference to **sustainable development** and the need to **integrate social, economic and environmental perspectives** in partnership approaches, proposals and projects.

While acknowledging and supporting the wide variety of different partnership forms across EU funds and programmes, consideration of a set of **common criteria on how to build effective partnership arrangements would assist a more robust global partnership approach** across the EU.

To implement the partnership principle more meaningfully, an **improved balance between compliance with rules and procedures and the flexibility to generate partnership solutions in specific and changing contexts** needs to be promoted so that partners and target groups can contribute more fully and effectively to programmes and projects.

6.2 Strengthening the partnership principles

The principles enshrined in the ECCP should be made more robust with clarity on what they mean and how they should be put into practice.

6.2.1 Representativeness

- There should be greater diversity in partner selection with an indicative list and clearer procedures for including partners such as:
 - Social partners including small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs) and social economy enterprises
 - Academic, research and other educational institutions
 - Civil society organisations representing youth,

people with disabilities, migrants, environmental issues, and non-traditional partners representing vulnerable and marginalised groups and end users

- Networks, coalitions and partnerships focusing on specific areas relevant to the investment priorities chosen, particularly at local level
- Gender equality and non-discrimination bodies
- Fuller consideration should also be given to the relevance, timing and 'fit' of diverse inputs in different contexts and programme phases, with selection based on the most appropriate partners for particular themes and focus areas.

6.2.2 Transparency and accessibility

- Greater transparency is needed in decision-making processes with clearer guidance around timeframes, expectations and opportunities for partner input.
- Managing Authorities should be able to demonstrate that diverse views have been carefully considered and the reasons why a particular decision or action has been taken can be fully explained.
- In addition to rules of procedure for the composition of Monitoring Committees, review processes should provide more clarity around rules of engagement and how partners can work better together.

6.2.3 Ongoing involvement

- There should be fuller participation of partners in the preparation of the Partnership Agreements, Operational Programmes and calls for proposals, and in Monitoring Committees.
- Special attention should be given to the promotion of partner engagement during implementation.
- Participation of relevant partners and stakeholders should be foreseen when governments are designing specific strategies required to fulfil ex-ante conditionalities.
- It should be made clear that involvement of partners must go beyond consultation.
- Concerted efforts should be made to integrate the local voice in programme cycles through place-based, bottom-up and participative approaches such as Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) and co-production.

6.2.4 Strengthening institutional capacity

- The ESIF should be used, through Technical Assistance

and other relevant means, to strengthen institutional capacity by:

- Improving the capacity to partner through partnership skills training for Managing Authorities, partners and stakeholders.
- Finding ways to support those partners who are unable to contribute effectively to ESIF programmes and projects due to lack of resources, skills, confidence or adequate time.
- Capacity building should be reinforced in the next programming period, especially if the thematic objective of enhancing the institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders is not included in the new regulations.

6.2.5 Review and assessment

- More innovative involvement of stakeholders should be encouraged through different forms of partnership review and assessment.
- There should be full representation of the European Commission in Monitoring Committees.
- Annual implementation reports should be fully discussed with stakeholders in Monitoring Committees, published online and made available for comments.
- Information should be shared on how ex-ante conditionalities have been fulfilled and underpin programmes in implementation reports.
- Feedback on the learning from review processes should be more fully integrated into practice with better reporting on the added value of working in partnership in different contexts and at different levels.

6.2.6 Mutual exchange and learning

- In addition to a commitment from the European Commission and Member States, the responsibility of all stakeholders to improve exchange and learning about the application of the partnership principle should be reinforced.
- More creative and proactive forms of information exchange should be promoted within, between and across multiple levels and funds with the establishment of a minimum set of requirements for the sharing of relevant practices.
- Beyond simply making good practices available, ways should be found to learn more strategically from partnership successes and failures through measures such as training and peer reviews, with a focus on using the knowledge obtained to inform and improve future developments.

- Efforts should be made to gather together, adapt and share useful partnership guidance, tools and learning materials from previous programming periods.

The recommendations outlined above have been put forward for careful consideration in preparation for the next ESIF programming round. However, it should be noted that efforts to promote the partnership principle and implementation of the ECCP are ongoing and much can be still be done to cement them more deeply in the current period.

The last years of the present programming period could be used to embed the partnership principle into practice.

REVES

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8. ANNEXES

Annex 1: Initial findings and recommendations from European Code of Conduct on Partnership (ECCP) Review

Between February 2017 and February 2018, the Thematic Network on Partnership conducted a peer review of the European Code of Conduct on Partnership (ECCP). The aims of the review were to assess the usefulness of the ECCP; learn more about the challenges encountered in its implementation, and develop recommendations to embed the partnership principle into the next European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) programming period (2021-27). Data was gathered from a review of available literature; feedback from members of other Transnational Thematic Networks¹ and from the ESIF Structured Dialogue process,² and from a survey conducted amongst European Social Fund (ESF) Programme Monitoring Committees (PMCs). The review also sought to raise awareness, promote consistency of approach to implementing the ECCP across the ESIF³ and offer examples of how the partnership principle can add value to programmes and positively impact policy-making. This short paper provides a summary of initial recommendations derived from our findings. It will be followed by a more detailed report that includes illustrative examples of the partnership principle in action.

The rationale for partnership

The reasons for a focus on partnership in the ESIF have been well documented.⁴ Working in partnership we can achieve improved:

- **Focus and coordination:** By harnessing the perspectives and resources of different societal actors the gaps, needs and priorities relating to Europe's development challenges are more clearly identified, and approaches that better incorporate the perspectives of end users and target groups created to address them. Policy coordination can also be synchronised

so that the reach of projects and programmes is expanded and duplication avoided.

- **Access to resources and innovative approaches:** A range of diverse contributions can be obtained from different stakeholders to address particular problems and challenges, and to develop more creative and dynamic approaches to societal challenges.
- **Institutional strengthening, capacity building and empowerment:** Through opportunities for building and improving strategic, operative and human capacity to overcome resources/size/skills limitations, those who are disadvantaged and/or marginalised can gain a stronger voice in the political arena and assume a more proactive role in addressing issues that affect them.
- **Legitimacy, stability and sustainability:** A more democratic policy 'mandate' is gained through broader stakeholder involvement, more participatory approaches to problem-solving and the generation of social capital. The inclusion of different organisations, groups and citizens in design, implementation and monitoring processes contributes to the durable and positive change that is the basis of a more cohesive society.

Partnership in current ESIF regulations (2014-20)

The ESIF regulations for the 2014-20 reinforce the importance of the partnership principle with calls for new and improved avenues for integrating stakeholder views into policy design and implementation, and the promotion of more robust connections between policy and practice. The **Common Provisions Regulation** (1303/2013) establishes guidelines for both Partnership Agreements and programmes across the ESIF. While stressing the importance of respect for the principles of subsidiarity, proportionality, and different institutional and legal frameworks, Partnership Agreements in each Member State are required to support an integrated approach to territorial development and alignment with the EU Growth Strategy "in cooperation with its partners, and in dialogue with the Commission" (Clause 20). Article 5 of the Regulation focuses on partnership and

¹ Responses were received from Managing Authorities and other stakeholders in Belgium (Flanders), Estonia, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Spain and Sweden, as well as at EU level.

² From members such as CEE Bankwatch, European Network for Independent Living (ENIL), EuroChild, European University Association (EUA), German Social Welfare Organisations, Lumos and REVES.

³ Feedback was received from PMC members in the following Member States: Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain and Sweden.

⁴ See: Guidebook: How ESF Managing Authorities and Intermediate Bodies Support Partnership, 2008.

multi-level governance and calls for the inclusion in Partnership Agreements and programmes of representatives from “competent regional, local, urban and other public authorities, economic and social partners and other relevant bodies representing civil society, including environmental partners, non-governmental organisations and bodies responsible for promoting social inclusion, gender equality and non-discrimination, including, where appropriate, the umbrella organisations of such authorities and bodies.” The Commission also commits to sharing key principles and good practices that facilitate assessments of the implementation of partnership and its added value in Member States.

The partnership guidelines outlined in the Common Provisions Regulation are reinforced in the **European Code of Conduct on Partnership (ECCP)**. The ECCP is a delegated act which provides common standards for partner involvement in ESIF Partnership Agreements and programme preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Reiterating the need for wider stakeholder involvement across national, regional and local levels to maximise the impact of funds, the key provisions of the ECCP include adequate and appropriate representation of partners mentioned in Article 5 of the Common Regulations (see above) that take competence and capacity for active participation into account (Arts. 2-4). Consultation processes with relevant partners are to be conducted in an accessible and timely manner with clarity of information on involvement (Arts. 5-9). Membership rules and procedures for monitoring committees are outlined and a call is made for assessment of partner roles in partnership performance and effectiveness during the programming period (Arts.10-16). Strengthening of the institutional capacity of relevant partners is encouraged through capacity building activities that target social partners and civil society organisations involved in programmes (Art. 17). Finally, emphasis is placed on the importance of disseminating good practice examples and exchanges of experience in order to promote learning about partnership across the ESIF. The vehicle proposed for this is a transnational thematic network on partnership (Art. 18).

Challenges to implementation of the partnership principle

Initial findings from the ECCP review show that while a number of ESF Managing Authorities (MAs) have made real efforts to promote the partnership principle, others have faced a range of problems in its implementation. An important concern is the marked lack of awareness of the

ECCP and its principles.⁵ Poor familiarity with the ECCP is translated into a focus on box-ticking rather than the embedding of partnership principles in programmes and projects. The lack of systemic and holistic partnership approaches across ESIF; more robust connections between the levels of policy and practice, and stronger links to an overarching sustainability agenda, is also of concern.

Most of the challenges mentioned in the ECCP review relate to the nature of participation channels and limited opportunities for genuine stakeholder engagement in programme design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. These include concerns around:

- **Representativeness:** Lack of diversity in selection of partners and the involvement of the ‘usual suspects’ rather than ‘non-traditional partners’, including end users targeted by programmes, who might add new resources and perspectives.
- **Transparency:** Accessible information channels and options for stakeholder engagement are still limited with weak connections and information flow between MAs and Monitoring Committee members, and between national, regional and local levels.
- **Ongoing involvement:** Meaningful stakeholder involvement is often weak, particularly during programme implementation, and frameworks for regional and local engagement, as well as informal involvement, are poor. Moreover, many partners lack the information and skills needed to adequately pursue the establishment and maintenance of ‘good’ partnership connections.
- **Lack of support:** Not enough attention is paid to factors that impede the full and meaningful participation of all partners and stakeholders in programmes and projects. Institutional strengthening and capacity-building efforts are often fragmented and there is also a lack of investment in training and support facilities for working in partnership.
- **Poor assessment and review systems:** Effective systems for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the partnership principle are generally absent. Participatory monitoring and evaluation systems that demonstrate the added benefit of working in partnership are also impeded by lack of resources and/or access to appropriate methodologies and enhanced review systems.

⁵ This may be due to the fact that the ECCP was finalised too late to fully inform the development of Partnership Agreements and Operational Programmes the 2014-20 programming period.

- **Exchange of learning:** Efforts to promote dynamic exchanges of learning about working in partnership across multiple levels have not received full attention, with a particular challenge being ways to make a stronger impact at policy level.

First recommendations to the European Commission

The focus on partnership, and its endorsement in the ECCP, is welcomed and should be continued and strengthened further in the next programming period by including specific provisions in the new Common Provisions Regulation on ESIF. However, in order to ensure the cohesion, ownership and long-term commitment necessary for a **sustainable development** agenda that integrates economic growth, social progress and environmental protection, and transfer of knowledge and learning from across Member States, increased endeavours should be made to **raise awareness about the ECCP**.

While there is ongoing debate with the Thematic Network on Partnership about the extent to which implementation of the ECCP should be mandatory, our findings confirm the importance of an emphasis on the **quality of implementation of partnership principle** and the **inclusion of the perspectives, knowledge and experience of diverse stakeholders in an ongoing manner throughout programme cycles**. To ensure this, greater efforts are required to connect different funds, institutional levels, sectors and policy arenas, as well as better integrate social, economic and environmental perspectives in partnership approaches, proposals and projects.

To implement the partnership principle more meaningfully, an **improved balance between compliance with rules and procedures and the flexibility to generate partnership solutions in specific and changing contexts** needs to be promoted so that partners and target groups can contribute more meaningfully to the achievement of positive change.

A reinvigorated ECCP with an emphasis on ‘doing more partnership better’ is needed for this. As well as a **more vibrant depiction of the added value of working in partnership**, meaningful examples of how partnership works in practice should be shared from both programme and project perspectives in different contexts. The **revised**

ECCP should also be available in good time so that its guidance can be fully integrated in the forthcoming programme round (2021-27).

The principles enshrined in the ECCP should be made more robust with clarity around:

- What **representativeness** means, and who decides on who is being represented, with encouragement of greater diversity in partner selection and clear procedures for including partners such as: small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs); social economy enterprises; academic, research and other educational institutions; civil society organisations representing youth, people with disabilities, migrants and environmental issues as well as non-traditional partners representing vulnerable and marginalised groups and end users; and networks, coalitions and partnerships focusing on specific areas that are relevant for the investment priorities chosen, particularly at local level. More attention to representation from gender equality and non-discrimination bodies is also necessary. In addition, greater consideration should be given to the relevance, timing and ‘fit’ of diverse inputs in different contexts and programme phases, with selection based on the most appropriate partners for particular themes and focus areas.
- **Transparency and accessibility** so that educational and other barriers that might be an impediment to engagement are carefully considered. Emphasis should also be placed on transparency in decision-making processes with clearer guidance around timeframes, expectations and opportunities for partner input. MAs should be able to demonstrate that diverse views have been carefully considered and explain the reasons why a particular decision or action has been taken. Furthermore, in addition to rules of procedure for the composition of Monitoring Committees, review processes should provide more clarity around rules of engagement.
- **Ongoing involvement** in all phases of programme development. This needs to be made more explicit so that, in addition to involving partners more fully in the preparation of the Partnership Agreements, Operational Programmes and calls for proposals, and in Monitoring Committees, deeper partner engagement is promoted during implementation. Participation of relevant partners and stakeholders should be foreseen when governments are designing specific

strategies required to fulfil ex-ante conditionalities. It should also be made clear that involvement of partners must go beyond consultation and that concerted efforts are needed to integrate the local voice in programme cycles through place-based, bottom-up and participative approaches such as Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) and co-production.

- The use of ESIF, through Technical Assistance and other relevant means, to provide partnership skills training for managing authorities, partners and stakeholders, and to **strengthen the institutional capacity** of those partners who are unable to contribute effectively to ESIF programmes and projects due to lack of resources, skills, confidence or adequate time. It is very important that capacity building for stakeholders is reinforced in the next programming period with clear indicators and budgets for this, especially if the thematic objective of enhancing the institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders is not included in the new regulations.
- **Review and assessment** processes that involve stakeholders more proactively and appropriately, and include European Commission representation on Monitoring Committees. Annual implementa-

tion reports should be discussed in the Monitoring Committees with stakeholders, published online and made available for comments. Implementation reports should also share information on how ex-ante conditionalities have been fulfilled and underpin programmes. Learning from review processes should be fed back more coherently into practice with better reporting on the added value of working in partnership in different contexts and at different levels.

- Beyond a commitment from the European Commission and Member States, the responsibility of **all stakeholders** to improve **exchange and learning** about the application of the partnership principle. More proactive information exchange within, between and across multiple levels and funds is necessary for this. Beyond simply making good practices available, ways to learn more strategically from partnership successes **and** failures should be encouraged through measures such as training and peer reviews, with a focus on using the knowledge obtained to inform and improve future developments.

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12 March 2018

Annex 2: Recommendation for changes to Article 5 of the Common Provisions Regulation (1303/2013)

Article 5: Partnership and multi-level governance

1. For the Partnership Agreement and each programme, each Member State shall in accordance with its institutional and legal framework organise a partnership with the competent regional and local authorities. The partnership shall also include the following partners:
 - (a) competent urban and other public authorities;
 - (b) economic and social partners, including representatives from small, medium and micro Enterprises (SMMEs), and social economy enterprises;
 - (c) relevant bodies representing civil society including environmental partners, non-governmental organisations, academic, research and other educational institutions, bodies responsible for promoting social inclusion, gender equality and non-discrimination, and non-traditional actors representing vulnerable and marginalised groups and end users at the local level.
2. In accordance with the multi-level governance approach, the partners referred to in paragraph 1 shall be actively involved by Member States in the preparation of Partnership Agreements and progress reports throughout the preparation, implementation and monitoring of programmes. Involvement should go beyond consultation and enable all stakeholders to contribute fully and meaningfully in programme cycles. Particular efforts should be made to integrate the local voice in programme decision-making through place-based, bottom-up and participative approaches such as Community-Led Local Development (CLLD).
3. A revised European Code of Conduct on Partnership shall set out and strengthen the framework within which the Member States, in accordance with their institutional and legal framework as well as their national and regional

competences, shall pursue the implementation of partnership. The code of conduct, while fully respecting the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, shall establish and share principles, measures and good practices for:

- the transparent procedures to be followed for the identification of relevant partners including, where appropriate, umbrella organisations, networks and coalitions representing end users and target groups that address specific areas relevant for the investment priorities chosen, in order to facilitate Member States in designating the most representative relevant partners, in accordance with their institutional and legal framework;
- the involvement of the different categories of relevant partners set out in paragraph 1 in the preparation of the Partnership Agreement and programmes, the information to be provided concerning their involvement with clear timeframes, expectations for different partner contributions and consideration of barriers that might impede participation in particular contexts and programme phases;
- the formulation of the rules of membership, engagement and internal procedures in monitoring committees to be decided, as appropriate, by the Member States or the monitoring committees of programmes in accordance with the relevant provisions of this Regulation and the Fund-specific rules, including the active representation of the European Commission;
- cases where the managing authority involves the relevant partners in the preparation of calls for proposals and in particular good practices for avoiding potential conflicts of interest in cases where there is a possibility of relevant partners also being potential beneficiaries;
- the full involvement of relevant partners and stakeholders in the preparation of progress reports and in relation to monitoring and evaluation of programmes in accordance with the relevant provisions of this Regulation and the Fund-specific rules so that partners are involved more proactively and appropriately;

- how the competent authorities of the Member States may use the ESI Funds, including Technical Assistance and other relevant means, to provide partnership skills training for managing authorities, partners and stakeholders as well as to build and strengthen the institutional capacity of those partners who are unable to contribute effectively to ESIF programmes and projects due to lack of resources, skills, confidence or adequate time, in accordance with the relevant provisions of this Regulation and the Fund-specific rules;
- the promotion of learning exchanges within, between and across multiple levels so that the knowledge gained from partnership experiences (both good and bad) is used to inform future developments.

The provisions of the code of conduct shall not in any way contradict the relevant provisions of this Regulation or the Fund-specific rules.

4. The Commission shall notify the delegated act of this Article and the European Code of Conduct on Partnership simultaneously to the European Parliament and to the Council by (insert date). That delegated act shall not specify a date of application that is earlier than the date of its adoption.
5. An infringement of any obligation imposed on Member States by this Article and the European Code of Conduct on Partnership shall not constitute an irregularity leading to a financial correction pursuant to Article 85.
6. At least once a year, for each ESI Fund, the Commission shall consult the organisations which represent the partners at Union level on the implementation of support from that ESI Fund and shall report to the European Parliament and the Council on the outcome.

Thematic Network on Partnership
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12 March 2018

Annex 3: Review of the European Code of Conduct on Partnership (ECCP), Scoping Document

Introduction

The working group on influencing policy was established in October 2016 as a sub-group of the ESF Transnational Network on Partnership. On behalf of the network, the working group membership explores how partnership

strengthens policy-making in a context of the European Social Fund (ESF) and transfers this learning for the benefit of all ESF stakeholders and beneficiaries. In late 2016, the working group proposed a review of the partnership principles enshrined in the European Code of Conduct on

Partnership. The scope of the review was agreed by the full membership of the network on partnership at its meeting held in February 2017. At that time, the network agreed to align the activity of both existing working groups under the review, as appropriate to their shared goals. The remainder of this scoping document summarises the rationale, objectives and anticipated results of the review.

Principles of Partnership

The principles of partnership prioritise collective decision-making between partners. The literature presents a diverse debate on partnership, as evidence both of the value of partnership working and an ongoing effort to enrich partnership practice. This literature will not be rehearsed here, however, some key features are relevant to a broad understanding of effective partnership working in our context. Effective partnerships promote equity and value parity of esteem between partners. They offer a clear focus on the objectives at hand, while recognising that the interests of individual partners may not be the same. Different outcomes are therefore both possible and permissible. In this context, compromise is just one strategy that may be used to arrive at consensus and other approaches may be deployed, so that effective partnerships tend to be innovative. Successful partnerships are, of necessity, strongly deliberative in practice. They centrally involve discussion and rationale building between partners. Such partnerships are dynamic in terms of their membership and representativeness is of ongoing concern.

The European Code of Conduct on Partnership (ECCP)

The European Code of Conduct on Partnership (ECCP) gives expression to the European Union's commitment to embed the principles and practice of partnership in the framework of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF). The ECCP values the partnership principle as essential to ensuring a collective commitment to Union policies, increasing the expertise and viewpoints available for the design and implementation of the ESIF Funds and to ensuring greater transparency in decision-making.

In accordance with Article 5 of the Common Provisions Regulation, the ECCP sets out clear expectations for the representativeness of public authorities, social partners and civil society groups sharing decision-making for the planning, implementation and evaluation of the ESIF funds in Member States. In addition, the ECCP endorses institutional capacity building for partners and makes provision

for exchange of experience and mutual learning, through the establishment of a transnational network to share good partnership practice between Member States. For all practitioners and stakeholders, the ECCP clarifies the concept and principles of partnership and underpins approaches to subsidiarity of decision-making, including for example, Community-Led Local Development.

Rationale for a review of the ECCP

The value of the partnership principle has been recognised by the European Union, as set out in the European Code of Conduct on Partnership regulated for the 2014-2020 funding period. In this context, the ECCP has been welcomed by Member States for both its ambition and its reach. It has been suggested that national and programme level partnerships have benefited from the clear mandate in the ECCP to contribute to stronger ESIF planning processes. Some two years following the establishment of Partnership and Programme Monitoring Committees, these benefits may now be demonstrated by means of a review.

In addition, while the ECCP is a useful starting point, there is much to do to ensure that deliberative and active partnerships are supported to maximise their impact on policy-making. The ESIF funds are currently at implementation stage in Member States. This is the stage when partnership practice may be less visible in decision-making and an emphasis on fund monitoring and administration may downplay the vital role being played by partnerships at project level in particular. A review of the ECCP will also serve to raise awareness of the need to sustain and to support partnerships at the fund and programme level during implementation and in advance of planning for the next ESIF funding cycle.

Furthermore, the review will respond to evidence of an uneven implementation of the ECCP across the different ESIF funds, as well as a relatively low level of awareness at the project level of its key principles. It is noted that the Commission is not a partner on programme committees and this may represent a weakness in terms of representation. There is a need to identify more informal mechanisms being employed to give life to partnership principles and also to demonstrate ways that partnership practice is impacting on policy-making.

Finally, the ECCP is a new and important pillar of the ESIF. The Regulation will be considered as part of the planning process for the next cycle of structural and investment

funds. By adopting an approach centred in partnership principles, the review goes beyond ECCP compliance and will demonstrate the added value of partnerships for the ESI funds. On this basis, the review will develop recommendations that will inform the next iteration of the ECCP .

Scope of the Review

The overall purpose of the review is to explore partnership principles and practice in a context of the European Structural and Investment Funds (2014-2020). The review will result in a series of recommendations for the improvement of the ECCP in the next programming cycle.

More specifically, as described above, the review will aim to:

- Raise awareness of partnership principles from project to programme level.
- Promote consistency of approach to implementing the ECCP, across the ESI funds.
- Offer good practice examples of how partnership principles can add value to programmes and positively impact on policy-making.
- Make recommendations to embed partnership principles into the new ESI funds programming period.
- Disseminate and promote the learning gained during the review.

As a peer-learning network of partners, the review will include a clear focus on sharing learning and good practice between members of the transnational networks in the first instance. Within the research activity, the widest range of partnership actors and stakeholders possible will be invited to participate. However, the engagement with the various actors and stakeholders will be organised to achieve the results described above.

Some limitations are noted. The review is not intended to assess or measure compliance with the ECCP. Instead, the review will go beyond compliance, providing practical guidance to partnership practitioners while at the same time, developing a set of recommendations for use in the next planning round and to improve the ECCP.

The timeline for the review is March 2017-March 2018, in order to make recommendations to embed partnership principles in the next ESI funding cycle. However, dissemination activities for some outputs will continue from April 2018.

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3 March 2017

Annex 4: Suggestions for improving partnership principles

The suggestions below were gathered from respondents during the review process and reflect the diverse views of those involved on particular areas for improvement.

Balancing accountability and flexibility

In order to avoid major delays, it is important to have a flexible mechanism in place to stimulate the more operative resolution of bottleneck situations. In cases where the issues raised can be resolved outside the ESIF framework and are not necessarily directly related to the respective specific objective or measure, the Managing Authority should, as soon as possible, delegate the parties to settle such disputes outside the ESIF framework, by documenting such decisions in the minutes of either the respective sub-committee of the Monitoring Committee or the Monitoring Committee itself.

Managing Authority/Programme Monitoring Committee,
Latvia

From the point of view of the transparency of partnership relations, a national platform, organised by Programmes, would be very useful to favour the exchange of data, information and good practices about how to involve partnerships during the implementation of Programmes. It would be also worthwhile to encourage the use of new means of communication, e.g. newsletters that facilitate interaction of the partnership with political leaders, opinion leaders and other external institutions.

Programme Monitoring Committee, Regional OP, Italy

Maybe guidance is needed from the Commission on how to rethink the structure of the selection and Monitoring Committees and how they work, as well as better exchange of best practices and discussions on what the output should be from the different meetings.

Managing Authority/Programme Monitoring Committee,
Luxembourg

Build and streamline the operation of an online consultation platform and update it on a regular basis. Launch an online tool (platform for knowledge and consultation) available for all members of the Monitoring Committees for national and regional Operational Programmes.

White Paper by social partners, Poland

Ongoing involvement

The Code of Conduct should cover not only principles but also specifications referring to ways of encouraging involvement in partnership; methods of empowerment within a partnership and identification of specific subjects that must involve partnership, with particular reference to the implementation phase of programmes.

Managing Authority, Regional Operational Programme, Italy

In order to strengthen awareness of the ECCP it should be obligatory for all members of the Monitoring Committee to have an introduction on the partnership principles and how the Monitoring Committee can keep the spirit of the ECCP alive during the programming period.

Programme Monitoring Committee, Sweden

Consultations should not take the form of submitting written comments and issuing written responses. Instead, we recommend an active discussion which, apart from consultative meetings for informing about planned changes, would consist of debates with authors of draft documents which would serve as an explanation of their intention and exchange of opinions. We also find organising chats with experts and expert on-call times justified.

White Paper by social partners, Poland

Consultative bodies very often exist at national/regional/local levels and are involved in sectoral policy-making processes but this does not seem to have been integrated in ESIF programmes in a systematic way. A first step should be to take advantage of what already exists and then perhaps explore new experiences of policy co-design growing in different territories using ICT as a supporting tool.

REVES

The Managing Authorities, European Commission and social partners should hold a discussion in the ESF Committee to explore ways in which to renew the European Code of Conduct on Partnership, taking into account social partners' needs at national, regional and sectoral levels. Topics that could be explored during this discus-

sion include: developing an approach whereby all national members of the European cross-industry social partner organisations are involved in helping to shape the priorities of the partnership agreements and in the preparation of Operational Programmes and are invited to participate in Monitoring Committees, as appropriate.

European social partners, 2018

Capacity-building

Efforts should be focused in building the capacity to partner with practical support on the skills needed to build and maintain effective collaboration.

Thematic Network on Partnership

In Latvia, in order not to jeopardise independence and objective views from NGOs and civil society, better involvement and higher policy impacts could be achieved if the EC provided targeted and direct support via an instrument for those partners with full separate funding outside the Member State Cohesion policy funding envelope. The EC could provide such an instrument / direct funding to civil society organisations involved in effective partnership processes from EC Technical Assistance funding.

Managing Authority/Programme Monitoring Committee, Latvia

In the Swedish context, Article 17 of the ECCP could further stress the importance of supporting small local authorities, economic and social partners and non-governmental organisations and their capacity to participate in the implementation of the programmes.

Programme Monitoring Committee, Sweden

Support could take the form of a dedicated funding line to support NGOs working on horizontal safeguards in EU funds. Better accessibility of external expert assistance, establishment of permanent Monitoring Committee secretariats independent of Managing Authorities, and possibly, a mechanism to pay out per diems to those Committee members who work there in addition to their normal duties would also help.

CEE Bankwatch, 2017

Trainings through Technical Assistance (from Operational Programmes) would be of great support for civil society organisations. An open dialogue between Managing Authorities and NGOs, and the Commission and NGOs would help to improve implementation of the partnership principle. Training and guidance for Managing Authorities

on the ECCP and how to involve the most marginalised groups in ESIF implementation is also needed.

ENIL

This will ensure monitoring and transparency in procedures and that the ECCP is honoured.

Opening Doors for Europe's Children

Review and assessment

The ECCP should regulate that Member States have to report on the quality of implementation of the partnership principle, e.g. in evaluation, it should not be sufficient to prove that partners have been part of the Monitoring Committee, Member States should report on measures they have conducted to involve all partners in decision making.

German Welfare Organisations

Monitor the implementation of the partnership principle and code of conduct on partnerships on a yearly basis through the European Semester process: require Member States to report on how the partnership principle is implemented in the Country Reports and in the National Reform Programmes. Improve the analysis of the implementation of the partnership principle in the frame of the progress reports.

Social Platform, 2016

To address the challenge of debating highly-specialised areas (specific niches) supported under the Regional Operational Programme (ROP), Monitoring Committee members would benefit from the involvement in meetings of an expert in a given field who could moderate the discussion and provide verification (e.g. based on the legal framework) with respect to the realism of the assumptions / requirements included in the given project selection criteria.

Programme Monitoring Committee, Poland

Exchange and learning

The exchange of good practices and dissemination of relevant outcomes regarding the labour market might be facilitated through special initiatives in cooperation with Public Employment Services (PES) networks.

A 'Partnership Day' in Europe might ensure greater visibility for the relevance of partnership structures and commitments in each EU Member State.

Programme Monitoring Committee, Sweden

Why not develop a mandatory course in the evaluation types requested by EU. Also, involve the academic world much more.

Programme Monitoring Committee Member, Sweden

Project level learning and sharing should be further developed, e.g. via seminars and peer learning. Ongoing connections via websites should also enable easy access to information.

Programme Monitoring Committee, Estonia

The advisory role of a European Commission representative in Monitoring Committees should be clarified and expanded. We propose that the ECCP is revised making sure that the current observer role of European Commission representative becomes more influential and meaningful.

One way of learning might be to develop a simulation exercise in which Managing Authority and stakeholder representatives reverse roles and address issues and challenges they both face in implementation of ECCP.

REVES

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