



**What opportunities for social services
in the European Structural
and Investment Funds (ESIF)
2014-2020 Programming period?**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction
2. European Social Fund (ESF), European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD): focus on priority actions
3. The partnership principle to ensure efficient and effective use of ESF and ERDF
4. Examples of local initiatives financed by ESF, ERDF and FEAD promoting social investment in social services
5. General guidelines on the effective use of Structural Funds to support social services
6. Conclusions

Social Services Europe brings together eight Europe-wide networks of not-for-profit providers of social and health care services who each have a track record in providing value-driven services for the most vulnerable in our societies. The network aims to strengthen the profile and position of social services, and promote the role of not-for-profit social service providers in Europe. For more info: www.socialserviceseurope.eu

© Social Services Europe | June 2016



1. INTRODUCTION

The European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) are the largest regional investment programmes in Europe with great potential for supporting social inclusion and anti-poverty policies, encouraging social innovation, labour market inclusion and reducing economic and social disparities between Europe's regions. The ESIF are implemented under shared management – which means that the management of the EU fund or programme is delegated to EU countries. Each Member State elaborates a National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) establishing the main priorities for spending the EU structural funding received for the programme in the period 2014-2020. Regional authorities elaborate Operational Programmes setting out the regions' priorities for delivering the funds. Although there is scope for regional flexibility, a region's priorities must be consistent with the member state's NSRF. There is an Operational Programme for each region in the EU.

The six European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), for the period 2014-2020 are:

- European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) which can support the development of social and health care infrastructure, the improvement of public administrations and cooperation project between countries and regions;
- Cohesion Fund (CF)
- European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)
- European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF)
- European Social Fund (ESF) can support investment in social inclusion and employment policies and initiatives for the modernisation of services.
- Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD)

This briefing focuses on European Social Fund, European Regional Development Fund and the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived priorities, outlining the main aspects of these funds that can support investment in social and labour market inclusion. It showcases examples of good practices of projects funded by the EU Structural Funds (in the 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 periods) and it provides general guidelines on the effective use of EU Structural Funds. It also showcases examples of successful cooperation between NGOs and public authorities in managing funds. The briefing aims to help social service providers working at local level to explore the opportunities provided by the ESIF for their work, including providing inspiration for projects. It also aims to help managing authorities to better understand the opportunities that the ESIF offer in the field of social services, and the impact that using the ESIF for such services can have. Member organisations of Social Services Europe's members are encouraged to work with the relevant people in the national/regional governments on the implementation of the Operational Programmes and use this briefing in their advocacy work at national/local level to promote the use of EU funds for their services.

In the current context of economic crisis and austerity measures, EU funding is an important source of financial support for social service providers. All sectors increasingly look for EC project funding. In the social and health sector, service providers look at those funding programmes to pursue innovation and service improvement, to develop new approaches and methodologies and to reach new target groups.

One of the major shifts of the new programming period 2014-2020 is that the ESIF will be used to deliver on the Europe 2020 headline targets: creating growth and jobs, tackling climate change and energy dependence, and reducing poverty and social exclusion. Within the European Semester mechanism¹, Member States have to report on the achievement of national targets connected with the Europe 2020 Strategy and on how they use the ESIF to deliver on those targets. For the first time a mandatory minimum of 23.1% of the total ESIF national allocation has to be spent on European Social Fund supporting stronger investment on poverty reduction, social inclusion and employment.

¹ The European Semester is an annual process promoting close policy coordination among EU Member States and EU Institutions. Member States present their fiscal and economic plans for the years to come to the EU in order to ensure economic stability and sustainability of the public finances. The EU institutions (Commission and Council) assess and monitor the decisions taken by Member States to detect, prevent, and correct problematic economic trends such as excessive government deficits or public debt levels. Beside this economic policy coordination and surveillance, the EU asked Members States to lay out their policy reforms that are connected with the Europe 2020 Strategy. This process happens during a 6-month period from the beginning of each year, hence its name - the 'semester'. More info at http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/making-it-happen/index_en.htm

2. EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND AND EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND: FOCUS ON INVESTMENT PRIORITIES

2.1 European Social Fund (ESF)

The European Social Fund is the EU's main tool to promote employment, encourage education and training, combat poverty, enhance social inclusion, and promote gender equality, non-discrimination and equal opportunities². The ESF aims to help support smart growth by attempting to fulfill four thematic objectives³:

1) *Promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility*

ESF funding supports organisations to realize projects aimed at training people and helping them to get a job. ESF benefits job-seekers and inactive people, including the long-term unemployed and people far from the labour market, young people, in particular those not in employment, education or training (NEET) or young people at risk of social exclusion. The ESF also promotes initiatives supporting entrepreneurs with start-up funding and it finances companies that need to cope with restructuring or lack of qualified workers. An example of ESF funded project promoting employment of people with disabilities is the innovative web platform Por Talento⁴ developed in Spain by the ONCE Foundation and FSC Inserta. The portal provides an opportunity for jobseekers with a disability to find a job tailored to their needs and to interact with experts who can help them find the right career or training options. Over 30.000 people with disabilities in Spain have found work by using the Por Talento web portal. Por Talento has also helped more than 8.000 people enroll in over 3.000 training courses and employment workshops. So far more than 200.000 people with disabilities and 4.000 employers have participated.

2) *Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination*

The ESF focuses on the active inclusion of disadvantaged people and finances initiatives aimed at integrating into sustainable and quality employment people excluded from the labour market. ESF "may be used to enhance access to affordable, sustainable and high quality services of general interest, in particular in the field of health care, services for the homeless, out of school care, childcare and long-term care services"⁵. Actions funded by the ESF can be complemented by the ERDF with investment in childcare infrastructure, healthcare infrastructure, long-term care services and housing to provide better access to services for the most disadvantaged. A good example is the Latvian investments to help people with minor mental disabilities start an independent life outside long-term care institutions, find families for children currently living in homes and provide more support for families caring for children with disabilities. With EUR 40.13 million in funding from the ESF and EUR 7.08 million from national funds, the Latvian Ministry of Welfare, local municipalities, long-term care institutions and non-governmental organisations collaborate to progressively establish community-based social services.

3) *Investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning*

The ESF finances initiatives enhancing access to lifelong learning, upgrading the skills and competences of the workforce and supporting transition between education and employment of young people. It includes support for programmes offering intermediate, technical and higher level skills, and skills needed by SMEs, as well as it helps low skilled people to progress at work. For example, ESF could be used to provide access to qualifications and training programmes for personal care and household workers who are self-employed or employed directly by the service user and do not have access to the same training subsidy schemes as employees of a service providing organisation.

² Regulation (EU) No 1304/2013, Article 21

³ A thematic objective is a specific priority to promote smart, sustainable and inclusive growth throughout the European Union. Therefore, the term thematic objective is not just used in referring to the ESF. All thematic objectives that the legislation lists are goals to support smart EU growth and correspond to various funds or projects financed by the EU for 2014-2020.

⁴ More information at <https://www.portalento.es/Paginas/Inicio.aspx>

⁵ Regulation (EU) No 1304/2013, Recital 6.

4) *Enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration*

Member States can use the ESF to finance actions aimed at improving the quality of public administration and public services at national, regional and local levels. However, only Member States that are eligible for support from the Cohesion Funds⁶ are considered eligible to use ESF to support actions strengthening their capacities for delivering efficient and effective public services in all sectors. ESF can be used to finance projects and initiatives promoting capacity building for all stakeholders, included service providers and NGOs, delivering education, lifelong learning, training and employment. Several Member States have already launched initiatives to implement the Voluntary European Quality Framework for Social Services (VEQF) in their social services sector. Future EU projects and programmes should enable sectoral actors at the grassroots level to develop quality systems that assess and stimulate the implementation of the VEQF in specific social services sector. [More detailed case-study from Estonia on page 9]

Within those four objectives, there are subcategories called investment priorities. There are 18 investment priorities that detail precise actions to be taken by the ESF to accomplish its main goals of supporting employment, education and training efforts throughout the EU. There are six investment priorities for thematic objective 1 (promoting employment and supporting labor mobility); there are another six for thematic objective 2 (promoting social inclusion and combating poverty); the third thematic objective (investing in education, skills and lifelong learning) has four specific investment priorities, and the last thematic objective, the 4th one, has two investment priorities. Some of the investment priorities include: promoting active and healthy ageing, implementation of the youth guarantee, socio-economic integration of communities such as the Roma, and community-led local development strategies.

The ESF budget for 2014-2020 is allocated to those thematic objectives and investment priorities. The amount of money in the fund devoted to each of the different objectives is the thematic concentration. The thematic concentrations are different in the developed regions, transition regions and less developed regions⁷. For more developed regions, Member States must concentrate at least 80% of their ESF allocation to carrying out five different investment priorities. For transition regions, Member States must concentrate 70% of their ESF allocation to carrying out five different investment priorities. And finally, for less developed regions, Member States must concentrate at least 60% of their ESF allocation to carry out five of the specific investment priorities. For all regions, Member States must devote at least the 20% of the total amount of money for ESF to fulfilling the objective “promoting social inclusion and combating poverty”. This means that projects and activities combating social inclusion/poverty and promoting employment among people in difficulties and those from disadvantaged groups, such as long-term unemployed, people with disabilities, migrants, ethnic minorities and marginalized communities, have more possibilities to be supported with ESF money.

2.2. European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)

The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) aims to strengthen economic and social cohesion in the EU and between regions. The economic and social cohesion is an expression of solidarity between the Member States and regions of the European Union. ERDF contributes to reducing the gap between the levels of development of the various regions by supporting investments in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs); in local infrastructure in particular sectors such as health, culture, tourism, education, energy and environment; in cooperation and exchange of experience between regions, towns, and relevant social, economic and environmental actors.

⁶ The Cohesion Fund is aimed at Member States whose Gross National Income (GNI) per inhabitant is less than 90 % of the EU average. It aims to reduce economic and social disparities and to promote sustainable development. For the 2014-2020 period, the Cohesion Fund concerns Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.

More at http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/funding/cohesion-fund/

⁷ Distinction between less developed, transition and more developed regions exist in order to ensure concentration of the Funds according to the level of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Less developed regions are regions whose GDP per capita is less than 75% of the average GDP of the EU-27. Transition regions include all regions with a GDP per capita between 75% and 90% of the EU-27 average. Last category concerns the more developed regions whose GDP per capita is above 90 % of the average GDP of the EU-27.

The use of ERDF is encouraged for measures investing in health and social infrastructures, such as accommodation for vulnerable groups, hospitals, schools, facilities for childcare, elderly care and long-term care; measures to reduce health inequalities or promote social inclusion through improved access to social, cultural and recreational services, and to contribute to the transition from institutional to community-based services. Services for older people and people with disabilities are highlighted as being in particular need of infrastructure investment. The transition from institutional to community-based care is a complex process which requires additional resources, especially at the beginning of the process and while both systems are running in parallel. The Structural Funds offer the EU and Member States an opportunity to invest in innovative services, which give individuals choice and control over what services are delivered and how⁸.

Member States are encouraged to use ERDF to undertake investment in the context of “community-led local development” strategies. This involves giving money to local partnership projects involving relevant stakeholders and addressing localized needs or challenges.

ERDF can be used in combination of ESF aiming at improving the institutional capacity and the efficiency of public administration and modernizing services.

Other investment priorities that may be relevant for social services include:

- enhancing access to technology, with reference made to the need for strengthening ICT applications for e-government, e-learning, e-inclusion, e-culture and e-health;
- promoting sustainable and quality employment, with reference made to supporting local employment initiatives and development infrastructure for employment services;
- investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning by developing education and training infrastructure.

2.3 Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD)

With the adoption of the 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework, EU structural funds were complemented with the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD). This new fund follows the former Food Distribution programme for the Most Deprived Persons (MDP), operated in the framework of EU agriculture policies. With the relocation to social cohesion policies, FEAD is a very different instrument, focusing on vulnerable people living at risk of poverty and social exclusion. The objective is to promote social cohesion, enhance social inclusion, and thus contribute to the Europe 2020 target on poverty reduction. FEAD shall help alleviating the worst forms of poverty, by providing non-financial, basic material assistance and social inclusion activities.

FEAD is designed to offer support especially to those furthest from the labor market and not (yet) able to benefit from programmes such as the European Social Fund (ESF). FEAD support is meant to respond to basic material and assistance needs, accompanied by different forms of social assistance, counselling and support. Early proposals for the FEAD programme suggested a focus on particular issues i.e. tackle homelessness, child poverty and food support. The FEAD regulation maintained a broader approach, insists nonetheless on addressing the immediate needs of the most vulnerable groups in society.

Like other EU structural funds, FEAD is implemented under shared management. National authorities are invited to elaborate Operational Programmes for the period 2014-2020. Managing authorities could choose between OP1 material assistance and OP2 non-material assistance, giving the programme significantly different shape and direction in the different Member States⁹.

⁸ The [European Expert Group on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based care](#) have developed a [toolkit](#) aiming to explain how EU funds can support public authorities in Europe with the development of quality family-based and community-based alternatives to institutional care

⁹ More about FEAD and different OPs on the official website at <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1089&langId=en>

⇒ *OP1 – Basic material assistance*

25 Member States opted for providing basic material assistance to most deprived people in their country. It is possible to use FEAD for distribution of food and/or other material assistance for personal use e.g. clothing, footwear, hygiene goods, school material or sleeping bags. The provision of goods is combined with accompanying measures, aimed at alleviating social exclusion e.g. social activities, family support, household support, legal advice, debt advice, also nutritional education.

⇒ *OP2 – Non-material assistance / Social inclusion*

Three Member States (Netherlands, Sweden and Germany) use FEAD to co-finance targeted social inclusion programmes, offering non-material assistance to most deprived people in local communities. Each of the three national OPs addresses particular groups not properly reached by regular social services but in need of comprehensive assistance and support. One OP focuses on social inclusion of the most vulnerable homeless people; another OP on social assistance for EU migrants temporarily staying in the country, the third opts for a combination of both aspects.

With the transition from agriculture to social policies, FEAD brings attention to the living situation and the full range of immediate needs of deprived people. Food and clothes may have a bigger share in FEAD budgets, nonetheless the social assistance and support measure are the crucial element for the programme. Social service providers involved in FEAD often provide both material and non-material assistance together – which is why they are considered essential for implementing the Fund. In several Member States, social service providers are actively involved in designing OPs, setting up logistics and infrastructure, and providing services in local communities.

3. THE PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLE TO ENSURE EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE USE OF ESF AND ERDF

The ESF and ERDF are designed and implemented in a partnership between the European Commission and national and regional authorities. The EU has introduced a Code of Conduct on Partnerships to encourage national governments and managing authorities to involve a wider range of stakeholders in the planning, implementation and monitoring of the spending of the EU Structural and Investment Funding programmes. Beside public authorities, this partnership should involve a wide range of other partners, such as NGOs, workers' organisations and social service providers.

The “partnership principle” promotes the closer cooperation between public authorities at national, regional and local levels, economic and social partners and civil society organisations throughout the 2014-2020 funding period. The involvement of partners from the civil society:

- ensures broad ownership of the projects and initiatives using EU Funds;
- reduces gaps in policy and the coordination of the strategy between different levels of government in terms of information, resources, funding, administrative and policy fragmentation;
- strengthens the capacity of local stakeholders and service users to engage with the management system of the Funds.

The respect of the partnership principle depends largely on whether the institutional and political culture in a Member States is already promoting consultations, participation and dialogue with the relevant stakeholders in the design and implementation of the public policies. According to this new principle, Member States have the obligation to organise a partnership but are free to establish the practical modalities for the involvement of the relevant stakeholders in the different stages of the programming.

The code of conduct sets objectives and criteria to support the implementation of the partnership principle and ensure the quality of the partnership. These include:

- Greater transparency in the selection of the partners representing regional, local and other public authorities, social and economic partners and bodies representing the civil society, to be appointed as members in the monitoring committees of the programmes.
- Ensuring that the partnership must effectively take place in all phases of the process, from the preparation and throughout the implementation, including monitoring and evaluation of all programmes.

- Supporting the capacity building of the partners for improving their competences and skills in view of their active involvement in the process.
- Creating platforms for mutual learning and exchanging of good practices and innovative approaches.

Examples of successful implementation of the “partnership principle” dated from the previous programming periods are described below.

a) Spain: Shared management of the Operational Programme Fight Against Discrimination

Spain is a unique example of where an ESF Operational Programme is fully managed, controlled and implemented by organised civil society. The Multiregional Operational Programme Fight Against Discrimination, is one of the 22 European Social Fund programmes for the period from 2007 – 2013. The programme is managed by ten public and private entities. The Operational Programme for the Fight Against Discrimination has been developed in Spain from the year 2000 by social entities that are known in fighting against social exclusion and vulnerability, such as the Cáritas Española, the Cruz Roja Española, Fundación ONCE and Fundación Secretariado Gitano. All work towards the objective of promoting active inclusion, equal opportunities, gender equality, improved education and training and, in general, contributing to social and human development.

The fundamental goal of the Operational Programme is to ensure employment access for the most vulnerable, those suffering discrimination and those in a position of social exclusion in Spain, including people with disabilities, migrants and the Roma population. The programme has not only proven successful in guiding these people towards employment, but is also a specific contribution to the security net of the most excluded people in the context of a severe economic recession such as the present, in which unemployment rates at the end of 2013 ascended to 26.02%. In spite of this high rate, the programme has continued to gain high employment levels for its target group, made up of the most vulnerable population segments and people in Spanish society.

If we consider the second period of programmes from 2017-2013, the Operational Programme in Spain has been especially ambitious as, apart from consolidating the “individualised itineraries” working method (development of personalized guidance programmes, training and labour insertion, which comprises the backbone of the intervention), the non-profit managing bodies have faced the challenge of economic recession by multiplying their efforts in training and mediation. They have made the programme more visible by increasing awareness-raising actions and they have intensified their collaboration with the Public Administrations and companies and mutual learning activities with the goal of making the work of the organisations a whole in style and in effects.

The impact of the programme from 2006 to 2011, as well as their future sustainability and feasibility within the Programmes of the ESF 2014-2020, has been assessed from a group of researchers from three universities - Universidad de Alcalá, Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha and Universidad Complutense de Madrid¹⁰. The result of the evaluation shows that the programme is socially and economically smart, that the investment made by the ESF, the Central and Territorial Public Administrations and the private entities have been valuable in terms of the social and economic returns they generate. The Operational Programme has a future ahead of it, given that it has proven itself to be a particularly appropriate response to recession situations, and it is closely aligned with the objectives of the EU 2020 Strategy and the new social policy responses. In fact, not only the programme has proven itself to have achieved remarkable impacts in employment access for the vulnerable and excluded people while also contributing to the removal of social and institutional obstacles that frequently discriminate against these people, but also because it can contribute to the Social Cohesion policy of the upcoming 2014-2020 period, rendering effective the Spanish Disability Strategy 2012-2020, the Strategy for the social inclusion of the Roma population in Spain 2012-2020 and the various integration plans for migrants and people in positions of poverty and social exclusion.

¹⁰ Assessment of the impact of the multiregional operational programme fight against discrimination - The employment of vulnerable people: a smart social investment. Available at: http://www.caritas.es/publicaciones_download.aspx?id=4717

b) Germany: Implementation of the Partnership Principle

At the federal level, horizontal partnerships work with the involvement of five ministries to ensure joint planning and delivery during the whole programme cycle. In these partnerships, key stakeholders such as welfare organisations, social partners, NGOs and others are involved in writing the Operational Programme and are part of the Monitoring Committee.

Of the 2.7 billion euro designated in the current funding period 2014-2020 for the ESF at the German federal level, 100 million euro will be spent for two partnership programmes, the ESF-Sozialpartnerrichtlinie (for social partners, 70 million) and rückenwind (for welfare organisations, 30 million). Both programme directives have been written jointly by the federal ministries and the partners.

Regarding the programme Rückenwind for welfare organisations, a steering group of six welfare organisations' representatives and six ministerial officials jointly decide about award criteria, what the best projects are and how much funding they will get. In the funding period 2007-2013, the programme has supported 131 personnel development projects which follow a wide range of approaches to personnel recruitment and retention and also to the establishment of sustainable personnel management. In this period, 60 million euros have been invested and the quality of the programme has been proofed through scientific research: 85 per cent of all participants answered in an independent study that rückenwind had a good or very good impact. Successful examples for projects are "Escaping the time trap with e-learning", "Networks to promote advancement for women", "Promotion of health as management process and corporate culture". More examples can be found on the programme's website: <http://www.bagfw-esf.de/aktuelles/>

In the current funding period 2014-2020, the programme has been further developed and now supports with 30 million euros integrated approaches for personnel and organisational development projects. Integrated projects in the social economy can be promoted in the following areas:

⇒ *Human resources development to improve the adaptability and employability*

Life-phase oriented personnel development, training, coaching, support for elderly workers, recruitment, community-based human resources development, etc.

⇒ *Organisational Development to improve the demographic strength of social economy enterprises*

Healthy working conditions, work-life balance, gender balance, leadership and corporate culture, new working time models, diversity management and support of inclusion, development of innovation, etc.

The implementation of Fund for European Aid for the most deprived (FEAD) is also done through partnerships. Next to welfare organisations' representatives in the Monitoring Committee and the joint writing of the Operational Programme, every FEAD project has to be implemented by a consortium of a local municipality and a social NGO. FEAD in Germany supports social inclusion projects for EU migrants and homeless people.

4. EXAMPLES OF LOCAL INITIATIVES FINANCED BY ESF, ERDF AND FEAD PROMOTING SOCIAL INVESTMENT IN SOCIAL SERVICES.

The following examples, although implemented in the previous funding period, show the type of initiative that can be funded under the current programming period. The selected good practices show that there are concrete methods to implement the partnership principle successfully and to use Structural Funds to support social services, including training and employment integration for disadvantaged groups.

Estonia: Implementing the European Quality in Social Service (EQUASS)

Astangu Vocational Rehabilitation Center was founded in 1995 under the administration of the Ministry of Social Affairs. Astangu is one of a kind vocational rehabilitation service provider in Estonia with clients all over the country and has a supportive role for the Ministry in decision making process. The European Quality in Social Service (EQUASS) Assurance system was and is implemented in Estonia with the support of European Social Fund. EQUASS Assurance is a certification programme for quality assurance and quality control in social services, based on the EU Voluntary Quality Framework for Social Services. It enables social service providers to assure the quality of their services to service users and other stakeholders. Astangu has been acting as EQUASS Local License Holder in Estonia since January 2012 thanks to the ESF support.

Implementation of EQUASS Assurance in Estonia started in 2010 with a pilot project. The project lasted for 2 years, during which 7 rehabilitation service providers implemented for the first time the quality system (including Astangu itself). The European Platform for Rehabilitation (EPR) was contracted as a guiding/ training/ capacity building partner in this process to support the implementation of EQUASS in Estonia. As the pilots were successful Astangu VRC went on with promoting EQUASS system in different services including homeless, childcare and elderly care. By 2016 more than 80 social service providers have been involved in implementing the quality system. Starting from 2018, rehabilitation service providers will have to have a certified quality system implemented in order to be eligible for providing services. This is the first time that implementing a quality system is required by law in Estonian history of social service provision.

In addition Astangu has been able to develop a separate department for promoting quality. The Centre for Quality in Social Services is working since January 2015 with the mission to improve quality awareness and develop competences of different social sector stakeholders to assure effective services that are based on the needs of service users. This all is done by several activities:

- Organize information seminars, workshops, training sessions and publish articles to raise quality awareness.
- Promote and support implementation of EQUASS Assurance quality system by acting as EQUASS Local License Holder. 15 new social service providers start implementing the system every year.
- Carry out research and analyses to support improvement of quality of social services, e.g. impact assessment of EQUASS quality system was carried out in 2014. This year the analyses of the needed competences of social service inspectors will be carried out to identify the needs for development of competences and provide trainings for the target group.
- Elaborating guidebooks and methodologies for creating mutual understanding about quality of social services. In 2016 the goal is to work out and agree on a quality standard for social services so that it would be clear what is needed to be a service provider who provides quality services.
- Co-operating with different stakeholders to set mutual goals and achieve mutual outcomes. National Stakeholders Committee was formed in 2012 consisting representatives from Ministry of Social Affairs, Social Insurance Board, Estonian Quality Association, the Estonian Chamber of Disabled People and service provider Tallinn Mental Health Center but as main activities are funded by ESF the Committee hasn't had a role in initiating, planning or agreeing quality improvement activities in Estonia.
- Importing and spreading international competences that support the improvement of quality of social services. We were partners in Erasmus+ strategic partnership project „Creating sustainable quality culture“ in 2013-2015. We're implementing a Norwegian service impact

and outcome measurement methodology and train our specialist about an empowerment tool from the Netherlands.

The activities of the Centre for Quality in Social Services are supported by the new ESF program until 2020 in an amount of 85% of all the costs.

Germany: Project Network “Jobbrücke Und Jobchance” - Helpdesk and Employment Support For Refugees In Saxony-Anhalt

The project’s objective is to support refugees in Germany and those seeking access to the German labour market through individual guidance and qualification. Helping refugees find employment and vocational training enables them to become more independent and no longer reliant on social benefits, thereby making them better able to integrate into society in the long run. Vocational training gives young refugees and persons granted tolerated prospects stay status durable and more stable. The project has focused particularly on the group of Roma refugees from the former Yugoslavia. Furthermore the project aims to sensitize the regional economy. The project tries to encourage employers to recruit refugees to meet labour demands.

The Sozialpädagogisches Institut (SPI) Soziale Stadt und Land Entwicklungsgesellschaft mbH was founded in 2000. It has its head office in Magdeburg and has further facilities in Halle (Saale), Dessau-Roßlau, Leipzig and Erfurt. The SPI is a member of the AWO (Workers Welfare Organisation) cooperative in Saxony-Anhalt and is very experienced in the management of ESF (European Social Fund) projects. Furthermore it manages small local initiatives as well as big European projects and supports NGOs with project management.

More detailed information on this project can be found at the following link http://www.solidar.org/IMG/pdf/2015_09_21_case_studies_migration_germany-2.pdf

Croatia: Social Basket: a new social service for the vulnerable residents of Koprivnica

The Koprivnica branch of the Croatian Red Cross, in partnership with the City of Koprivnica and the volunteer organisation "Rad na dar", coordinated an initiative called Socijalna Košarica ("Social Basket"). The 12-month "Social Basket" project was established in December 2014 to provide a new social service to the vulnerable residents of Koprivnica who have been most severely affected by the global economic crisis. By strengthening collaboration between civil society organisations and local government, "Social Basket" aimed to improve social service provision to people at risk of exclusion. In order to build capacities among civil society staff and volunteers, and increase information-sharing between NGOs, potential donors and citizens, project partners held a series of educational cycles and training sessions throughout the year.

In June, a social shop was launched at the Croatian Red Cross premises in Koprivnica, providing a safe and friendly place for the distribution of food parcels and other basic items such as hygiene products. Working in collaboration with Administrative Department of Social Affairs and Services of the city of Koprivnica, project partners established a set of criteria for the allocation of packages to ensure that they reached those most in need. The target group was thus identified as residents of Koprivnica that were receiving housing benefits, but no public nutritional support.

A network of trained volunteers collected food and other grocery donations from buyers in local supermarkets for distribution in the social shop. Since the initiative was launched, over 1,800 kilograms of mixed food items have been collected and a total of 426 packages distributed to vulnerable Koprivnica citizens. The wider community has been actively involved in the project, with forty-seven local volunteers – including high-school students, the unemployed, pensioners, and professionals with different profiles and expertise – dedicating around 750 volunteer hours.

"Social Basket" project received financial support from the Operational Programme for Human Resource Development under the European Social Fund.

More information at <http://www.redcross.eu/en/News-Events/Red-Cross-Success-Stories/Croatian-Red-Cross-Social-Basket-Initiative/>

United Kingdom: From exclusion to employment: A model for “impossible to reach” groups under the European Social Fund in Wales.

In 2012, organisations active in the field of homelessness in Wales decided to build a partner consortium called Places of Change Cymru (Wales), with the main objective of preparing for a pan Wales ESF bid for the 2014-2020 round in order to spread a previously funded European Social Fund project under the 2007-2013 programme period: Cyrenians Employment and Training. This project was awarded funding in 2009 under the ESF Priority 2 for the Swansea Bay area of Wales to increase employment and to tackle economic inactivity. The budget of the project was £3.8 million of the ESF funds over 3 years.

The general aims of the project were to helping vulnerable groups into sustainable employment and to provide specialised outreach engagement services. This was implemented using a three-tier model based on individual packages promoting support towards sustainable employment covering (1) Building life skills and training for people with intensive support needs, through a Community centre providing a range of social services (2) Various forms of work coaching through employment practice projects (3) Links with the local employment agency to find more sustainable job placements in the social enterprises or the mainstream labour market. The results of the project were the following:

- 8,416 enrolled - this was 10% over the target;
- 1,279 gained a qualification – this was 7% under target but was expected to the unreasonable high target set at the beginning;
- 1,533 entered employment at the end of their support – this was 3% under but well within the 15% variance set by the Welsh ESF managing authority, and includes a very high number for impossible to reach service users.

The model used in this project aims to build pathways towards sustainable employment for hard-to-reach groups, or indeed people who are considered “impossible to reach”. The pathway is built on holistic packages which include a strong social/health service component in order to address the high support needs of the project clients. This project demonstrated that active inclusion for people really far from the labour market (such as homeless people) can be achieved.

Latvia: People with disabilities or intellectual disabilitiesintegration into employment and society - An ESF funded project from the programme in period 2014-2020***

The Social Integration State Agency (SIVA) in Latvia operates under the supervision of the Ministry of Welfare in the field of vocational education and training, professional and social rehabilitation. In 2016, SIVA initiated the ESF funded project “People with disabilities or intellectual disabilities integration into employment and society” aiming to develop and implement new vocational training programmes for people with intellectual disabilities and severe disabilities. So far 5 training programmes and 35 skill programmes have been developed and a new system for skill certification has been established. The project contributes to improve the professional adequacy system and the labour market research, as well as to support job finding. The project has reached 100 persons, 60 people were involved in education/training, employment, including self-employed. SIVA collaborates with several NGOs, employers' organizations, independent experts in vocational/professional rehabilitation field and representatives of potential clients. The project will end in 2019.

Sweden: Västerås Diocese – creating an entrepreneurial culture

Västerås Diocese in central Sweden used ESF funding to start to change the culture of the organisation and to stimulate thinking about creating social enterprises. In 2011 the ESF called for projects in professional development with three aims: to help people to keep their jobs in a changing labour market, prevent social isolation and develop rural areas. The longer-term goal was to develop jobs in new areas, and develop the church's role in society more broadly. The diocese therefore raced against the deadline to apply for ESF support, and was awarded a grant of 6.4 million kronor (€676,000). There was no need to find matching funds, as the sum was pre-financed, with half the money coming from the ESF and the other half from the government.

The aims were to give employees in 30 parishes the skills to lead new social economy projects, to start ten new projects, to build an understanding of the opportunities open to the church, to create support structures and more effective forms of communication and collaboration, such as working groups in the 'contracts' between the parishes – and to disseminate its learning regionally, nationally and with its transnational partners.

The underlying idea behind the project was to change the church's culture. In 1862, a deal was done whereby the tasks of church and state were separated – and since that time they have not overlapped. Both streams of work are financed from taxation, and budgets were never in question, and slowly grew. The project started by mapping the competencies of its staff, through an online survey, which helped employees to realise that they had skills that none of their colleague suspected that they had – and which they were not using. The responses were encouraging. It was sent to 1,162 people and 837 replied. Of these, about 500 thought that their own congregation should start new activities to meet social needs, and 400 had concrete ideas for what these might be. Over 200 were willing to lead such a project.

After a three-stage training programme ten new projects have been launched, of which two have potential for replication: green rehabilitation, and craft workshops and shops. The project succeeded in bringing about organisational development. It developed a participative process of change, built some new collaborations and, according to the evaluators, participants felt that the climate in the church had changed. This development process is continued since external funding ended.

Germany: Mobile counseling service for new immigrants from Southeast Europe – 'Mobi Berlin'

Germany has opted for an operational programme II for social inclusion measures. FEAD is used for three groups of beneficiaries: EU migrants (including Roma), young children of EU migrants, and homeless people. Through FEAD projects, these target groups, which are very far away from the labour market and therefore cannot be reached by ESF projects, can be coached. FEAD therefore is a "bridge" to the normal support and aid system. Welfare organisations and NGOs have been involved in the development of the operational programme and are part of the FEAD monitoring committee. Every FEAD project has to be implemented by a consortium of a local municipality and a social NGO.

One example of how FEAD can be used is the Project "Mobile counseling service for new immigrants from Southeast Europe – 'Mobi Berlin'", implemented by Caritas and the Berlin municipality. To improve the social participation for the newly arrived most disadvantaged EU citizens, this project focuses on four goals: contact with the target group; initial information and counseling; placement in the official aid system; awareness-raising activities and public relations.

To get into contact with the target group, the project uses outreach work and counseling offices. During the outreach work, the project's employees speak to the target group in their native language, provide information material in their language, give first information, ask for problems and inform about the project's services. At three locations, counseling offices with regular opening hours are opened. In these focal points, initial consultation can be made, support can be offered and an integrated consultation process can be started. The target group normally likes to use the focal points after a successful initial contact. Through word-of-mouth recommendations, other migrants join the focal points.

The project raises awareness about specific problems, the legal situation, cultural background and opportunities for integration of the target group. 'Mobi Berlin' acts as information pool and develops information material (flyers, brochures, etc.), supports research and provides information on its website. For the target group, information material in several languages is developed, which provides information on services and contact persons.

France: using the distribution of food baskets as an entry point to meet and accompany the most deprived

Since 2014, a French collective of four national associations are benefitting from the European FEAD fund in order to finance the distribution of food items to people in need. The French Red Cross (FRC) is participating to this national initiative and is organizing food distribution in 700 centers around the

metropolitan and French overseas territories. For the past two years, the FRC has distributed about 41 000 tons of food items to more than 400 000 families. The FEAD has helped financing about 30% of the supply in food products, giving the activity a solid base.

The objective of the FRC is to consider the distribution center as the first step to an adapted accompaniment program that goes beyond the simple distribution of food items. On their first arrival to the center, the individuals are invited to sit down with a dedicated volunteer for a discussion on their global situation. The idea is for the volunteer to understand the specific needs of the received person and if necessary orient them to adapted other FRC offices or associations (health services, administrative and legal support, clothing distribution, etc.). The FRC works in constant partnership with public social services. This dialogue is renewed at each distribution, once or twice a week in general.

In order to put in place these accompanying measures, the FRC has developed a specific training module for the volunteers in charge, “welcoming-listening training”, and is financing the creation of dedicated cozy spaces within the center-buildings to receive the beneficiaries in a trust-enhancing atmosphere. Finally, in order to better involve the accompanied persons, the association is progressively re-organizing the centers into self-service shelves rather than set-baskets.

For more information, please follow us on our website: <http://www.croix-rouge.fr/Nos-actions/Action-sociale/Aides-alimentaires-materielles-et-financieres/aide-alimentaire>

5. GENERAL GUIDELINES ON THE EFFECTIVE USE OF ESF AND ERDF TO SUPPORT SOCIAL SERVICES

The following guidelines aim to support national governments, managing authorities and service providers to make decisions promoting investment in social services and to encourage service providers to effectively use the Funds.

⇒ **Building synergies between the ESIF and encouraging local partnerships**

Public authorities and service providers are encouraged to use various investment funds from different ESIF programmes to finance projects. An interesting way of cumulating ESIF programmes is through community-led local development (CLLD) which is an instrument that representatives of public administrations can use to collaborate in partnership with organised civil society and citizens at sub-regional level and at local level. CLLD can mobilise and involve local communities and organisations to contribute to achieving the Europe 2020 Strategy goals of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, fostering territorial cohesion and reaching specific policy objectives.

⇒ **Identifying local needs and connecting them to national and European priorities**

Public authorities and service providers are encouraged to collaborate when preparing the Partnership Agreements and Operational Programmes (now already approved for the period 2014-2020) and ensure that EU funded calls are relevant to regional and local needs. Service providers are encouraged to take part in public consultations and talk to key organisations and Ministries who are involved in negotiation of the programmes, such as Ministries responsible for economic, financial affairs as well as health, employment or social matters.

It is important for social service providers to become more familiar with Operational Programmes, developing closer relationships with managing authorities and connecting with colleagues in the field who have experience with EU funds. Successful project proposals refer to European priorities and contribute through their activities to achieving results relevant to the programmes' priorities and targets for Europe 2020 strategy (creating growth and job, and reducing poverty and social exclusion).

⇒ **Thinking about concrete results**

It is important that service providers when writing project applications outline an evaluation plan and indicators¹¹ that will be used to assess the impact of the initiative, as managing authorities selecting projects will expect this. Under new funding regulations for 2014-2020, there is more emphasis placed on performance monitoring and evaluation of EU-funded projects

⇒ **Ensure the engagement of service providers in the European Semester and Europe 2020 processes**

Since the ESF is linked with the reporting mechanisms of the European Semester and the Europe 2020 strategy, it is essential that service providers are consulted in the process of Member States drafting the National Reform Programmes. Most countries have not complied with the Commission guidelines to involve civil society in drawing up their actions to be taken to reach the Europe 2020 targets. NGOs must be able to bring their experience and knowledge of what is happening on the ground to the discussions, to highlight groups suffering from or at risk of poverty and ensure that poverty and exclusion is tackled by national governments in the NRPs. This in turn will ensure the ESF funds can focus on these priorities, and not merely on employment measures.

More information info@socialserviceseurope.eu

¹¹ List of common indicators proposed by the European Commission is available at the following link (page 20) http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/2014/working/wd_2014_en.pdf. Critics have been raised on proposed indicators taking quite a narrow view of results with a mainly labour market focus, despite the overall programme having a much broader scope. There is no reference to social inclusion and six months is not particularly long a time scale to evaluate the success of a programme. There is also no mention of the quality of the employment (Eurodiaconia).