



Transnational Cooperation in the European Social Fund 2014-2020

An Introductory Guide

November 2015

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Transnational cooperation in the **ESF** 2014-2020

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Technical dossier

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This guide has been elaborated on the basis of the work carried out under the auspices of the ESF Learning Networks, in particular the Learning Network on Transnational Cooperation in ESF, during the period 2009-2012. It is intended to serve as a guide to transnational cooperation in the 2014-2020 period, including how it responds to weaknesses identified in earlier financial perspectives and how it continues and extends good practice initiated previously.



1. OVERVIEW

1.1 Rationale for engaging in transnational cooperation

Transnational cooperation has been part of the European Social Fund's operations since its foundation in 1957. Whether initiatives have been limited to simple exchanges of experience and know-how or have aimed at Europe-wide solutions to common problems, such cooperation has proven its worth over the years.

The main purpose of transnational cooperation between member States under the ESF is to contribute to the **quality and effectiveness of policies and delivering reforms**. Essentially this means the exchange and sharing of information and good practice, and working together towards common solutions by bringing together administrations, social partners and non-governmental organisations in the policy fields of relevance for the ESF. A transnational dimension has an important multiplier effect: it can strengthen capacities to innovate, modernise and adapt to new social and economic challenges, and it can help identify issues and suggest solutions for reforms which can shape and deliver the relevant policy targets. It can also help to improve the quality of governance.

For project promoters, input from foreign partners may enable them to approach challenges in novel ways, to solve problems more efficiently, and to avoid pitfalls during processes of change. The contacts made tend to last over time and lead to new project ideas, while involvement in international teams **builds institutional capacity** and establishes a valuable track record.

For public administration, transnational cooperation provides a structure in which to pursue **mutual learning** among EU Member States on issues of common interest, for instance through the Learning Networks instituted during the 2007-2013 programming period. It may also serve as a tool to address employment or social problems in a particular country, as has been the case with the German IdA programme for youth employment. For bodies with an interest at the EU level, such as the European Commission or umbrellas of social partners, it provides a space to capitalise reform initiatives across the continent, and to build a common European understanding of shared challenges to society and the world of work.

1.2 A mutual learning objective

The objective of transnational cooperation is to promote **mutual learning**. Therefore, cooperation activities that do not seek to promote mutual learning cannot be considered as transnational cooperation. Mutual learning means exchanging information, sharing, assessing and adapting good practice, and also working together towards common solutions by bringing together people, administrations, social partners, NGOs and organisations in the field of employment, social inclusion, education, training and life-long learning as well as building the capacity of administration and other stakeholders.

Lessons drawn by Member States from cooperation activities should be mutual but not necessarily the same. Each partner should be able to identify what they expect from learning from and with others, such as helping to develop

and implement effective responses to policy needs as addressed in the country-specific recommendations issued within the European Semester.

Thus the goal is to tap into a shared pool of experience and results to improve policy approaches and delivery systems, establishing a capacity to bring together complementary skills and resources to tackle emerging issues of Europe-wide interest.

The required participation of partners from at least one other Member State does not necessarily entail that all co-operating countries will be carrying out the same activities. Participation for the purposes of transnational cooperation means cooperation, in any form, with a view to promoting mutual learning through the exchange of experiences and solutions between the parties involved. It may thus entail different forms and degrees of participation from the Member States. What matters is that the participation, irrespective of its form, aims to bring about mutual learning.

1.3 Article 10 of the ESF regulation

The legal base for Transnational Cooperation in the European Social Fund (ESF) during the 2014-2020 programming period is laid down in Article 10 of the ESF Regulation – see section 6.6.¹ Contrary to the 2007-2013 programming period, transnational cooperation is now mandatory. However, this obligation is applied at Member State level and is not compulsory for every Operational Programme. Moreover, derogations from the above obligation could be granted to Member States with a single OP supported by the ESF or a single multi-fund OP. In these cases Member States may exceptionally, in duly justified cases and taking account of the principle of proportionality, choose not to support transnational cooperation actions.

As to the implementation of transnational cooperation, Article 10 introduces:

- The **Common Framework**: optional institutionalised EU-level collaboration between Managing Authorities and/or Intermediate Bodies on a limited number of Common Themes with support from an EU-level platform;
- The **Flexible approach**: the Regulation allows for Managing Authorities/Intermediate Bodies to implement

transnational cooperation independently of a centralised function, i.e. as during 2007-2013;

- A **combination**: Managing Authorities/Intermediate Bodies may choose to realise transnational cooperation actions either under the Common Framework, or via the flexible approach, or both.

1.4 Why a Common Framework?

In the context of two successive Learning Networks, from December 2009 to March 2015, ESF Managing Authorities, Intermediate Bodies and National Supporting Institutions identified certain weaknesses in the way transnational cooperation was implemented during the 2007-2013 programming period. For instance, the lack of institutionalised coordination across Member States meant that project promoters found it hard to identify partners in other Member States and establish partnerships.

Another issue commonly encountered was the fact that restrictions on eligible expenditure hindered partner search and discouraged foreign organisations partnering with domestic applicants (costs related to partner search activities or incurred by foreign organisations were not usually allowed as eligible expenditure). More generally, the demonstrated capacity of transnational cooperation to stimulate policy innovation has been underexploited compared to its use in other EU programmes and initiatives.

While a standing coordination function was the logical response to the lessons learnt in the period 2007-2013, the drawbacks perceived in the preceding EQUAL 2000-2006 Community Initiative also had to be taken into consideration (national administrations have generally viewed the mechanism established for EQUAL as overly rigid and restrictive). The coordinating function therefore had to be not only common across Member States, but also to allow Managing Authorities/Intermediate Bodies sufficient flexibility.

1.5 What is the Common Framework?

The Common Framework's goals are two-fold:

- to help project promoters to **develop, implement and capitalise initiatives** comprising or involving transnational cooperation actions;
- to stimulate mutual learning between stakeholders from different Member States on ESF-related issues.

¹ Regulation (EU) No 1304/2014 of 17 December 2013.

It also seeks to adapt and, where possible, institutionalise instances of good practice from the 2007-2013 period. Examples include the Learning Networks established on various subjects by the European Commission and the international partner search events organised by the Polish National Supporting Institution.

In relation to the **first goal, two coordinated calls for projects** will be organised over the programming period. Such calls will have no budget of their own, but will rather comprise aligned and synchronised national and/or regional calls launched by Managing Authorities/Intermediate Bodies participating in the Common Framework (and financed from national and/or regional level OPs). Support will be provided by the bodies and tools constituting the EU-level platform, notably by technical assistance provided by AEIDL on behalf on the European Commission from September 2015, Thematic Networks established for each Common Theme to give policy direction, a partner search database, and possibly partner search events.

The **second goal of mutual learning** will be pursued through the Thematic Networks, which should bring together Managing Authority/Intermediate Body representatives, technical experts and other stakeholders as relevant. The achievement of both goals will revolve around the nine Common Themes outlined in chapter 2, though coordinated calls are not expected in connection with themes where interest from project promoters is likely to be limited.

1.6 Possibilities under the flexible approach

Under the flexible approach, Managing Authorities/Intermediate Bodies may continue to implement transnational cooperation as they did in the 2007-2013 programming period, and thus entirely independently of any central EU-level organising function. This does

not mean, however, that collaboration between Member States is not possible – only that, as compared with the Common Framework, it will be driven by individual Member States (rather than the European Commission). Following on from the 2007-2013 period, such cooperation is expected on a thematic and/or regional basis; examples would include seeking to increase youth employability via work experience abroad, or using transnational cooperation as a mechanism for the realisation of Macro-Regional Strategies, such as that for the Baltic Sea Region (for further detail, see chapter 4).

1.7 The programming options

As stated in Article 10 of the ESF Regulation, activities related to transnational cooperation are not linked to a specific investment priority. They should be programmed under the most relevant investment priority/priorities according to their themes.

Member States may decide to programme and implement transnational activities only related to one or several of the five selected investment priorities. In this case, there is no impact on thematic concentration. They may also decide to programme such activities under other investment priorities, using the built-in flexibility outside the main investment priorities.

Different programming options — namely the specific approach, the horizontal/cross-cutting approach and the dual approach — are available:

1.7.1 Specific financing

In the case of a specific priority axis dedicated to transnational cooperation (for which the ESF contribution is increased by 10%) in an OP, the ESF budget dedicated to transnational cooperation does not count for thematic concentration (*see table 1*).

Table 1: Specific financing of transnational cooperation

Priority Axis 1	Priority Axis 2	Priority Axis 3	Priority Axis 4	Priority Axis 5
Thematic Objective 1	Thematic Objective 2	Thematic Objective 3	Transnational cooperation	Technical Assistance
Investment Priority 1+2+3	Investment Priority 1+2	Investment Priority 1		

Table 2: **Horizontal financing of transnational cooperation**

Priority Axis 1	Priority Axis 2	Priority Axis 3	Priority Axis 4
Thematic Objective 1	Thematic Objective 2	Thematic Objective 3	Technical Assistance
Investment Priority 1+2+3	Investment Priority 1+2	Investment Priority 1	
Transnational cooperation			

This option has the advantage of dedicating ring-fenced resources to transnational activities. It supports a strategic approach clearly focused on a number of priorities. Transnational cooperation as such and individual transnational projects will have better visibility and could be easily monitored. It implies a heavier administrative burden and risks appearing isolated from the other OP priorities.

1.7.2 Horizontal/cross-cutting financing

This approach consists in integrating transnational cooperation within all or some thematic priorities of an OP (see table 2).

It offers flexibility in the design and scale of projects, and allows more freedom for innovative projects across a wider variety of themes. It is more likely to build capacity for transnational cooperation among a wider circle of ESF actors.

On the other hand, lower visibility might lead to reduced commitment and the fragmentation of resources.

1.7.3 Dual financing

A combination of the specific approach with the horizontal/cross-cutting approach allows different types and sizes of transnational projects, addressing a wide variety of themes. However, the existence of the specific priority means reduced incentive for organisations funded under other ESF priorities to implement transnational activities.

1.8 Synergies with other EU instruments

Apart from the cohesion policy instruments, including European Transnational Cooperation (ETC) Programmes which are supported by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), a number of other EU instruments support transnational cooperation in the areas falling under

the thematic scope of ESF: Horizon 2020, the Employment and Social Innovation programme (EaSI), Erasmus+, the EU Health programme. Member States may find it advantageous to create synergies with the above in order to ensure complementarity between ESF funding and other already established ways of cooperation.

Similarly, Managing Authorities may find it relevant to focus transnational cooperation under the ESF on specific regions or Member States by creating synergies with other frameworks, such as the Macro-Regional Strategies, with a view to addressing common challenges faced by a specific geographical area. For further details, see chapter 4.



2. THE COMMON FRAMEWORK

2.1 Participation of Member States

Member States have been invited by the European Commission to decide on their **participation** in one or more of the Common Themes of the Common Framework. This committed them to take part in coordinated calls and mutual learning, while receiving the benefits of the EU-level platform.

Member State participation in the Common Framework is entirely optional – i.e. Managing Authorities/Intermediate Bodies may choose not to participate in the Common Framework at all. It is not subject to any preconditions, such as transnational cooperation actions being financed under a dedicated priority axis. It does not imply collaboration in respect of all Common Themes, but only those identified by each Managing Authority/Intermediate Body. The possibility of opting in and out remains open during the programming period.

2.2 The Common Themes

The nine Common Themes around which the Common Framework will revolve, together with examples of related issue areas, are listed in the table below. They reflect ESF investment priorities, as well as input from Member States and Managing Authorities/Intermediate Bodies. Their precise scope, particularly in the case of broader Common Themes such as Employment and Inclusion, will be agreed by the relevant Thematic Networks in line with their members' mutual interests. A clear focus is likely to facilitate partnerships and operational results. Social innovation and gender mainstreaming should be taken on board within the different thematic fields (see section 2.3).

As per Article 10(3) of the ESF Regulation, the Common Themes were proposed to and endorsed by the ESF Committee; if appropriate, they may be revised during the programming period after review (see table 3).

Table 3: *The Common Themes and sub-themes*

<p>Employment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employability and labour integration • Labour mobility • Employment services – improvement of and access to • Work-life balance • Adaptability • Green jobs • Active ageing 	<p>Youth Employment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NEETs – young people who are “Not in Education, Employment or Training”. • Recent graduates • Mobility measures • Apprenticeships • Traineeships 	<p>Learning & Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combating/addressing early school leaving • Vocational Education and Training • Accreditation (of prior learning) • Lifelong learning • Transitions within and between school and work
<p>Social Economy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social entrepreneurship (including outreach, start-up support, coaching /mentoring, social franchising) • Financial instruments to support social entrepreneurship 	<p>Inclusion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active inclusion in the labour market • Access to services (e.g. transport, health, welfare, housing, etc.) • Combating discrimination, such as Roma • Fighting against poverty • Local community development 	<p>Migration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribution of the ESIF in promoting integration of migrants in the labour market and society • Synergies between EU funds (ESIF, Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, etc.)
<p>Governance & Public Administration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Judiciary reform • E-government • Policy and legislative processes • Human resources management • Results based management • Monitoring and evaluation 	<p>Simplification</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplified costs option • Financial instruments • Joint action plans 	<p>Partnership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of the European Code of Conduct on Partnership applicable to European Structural and Investment Funds

2.3 Mainstreaming gender equality and social innovation

Social innovation and gender equality should be taken on board transversally within the different thematic fields.

Gender equality objectives and a dual gender equality approach, i.e. including both mainstreaming and specific actions, are mandatory requirements in the ESF for the funding period 2014-2020.

Most Member States have now incorporated gender mainstreaming into their operational programmes. However, their implementation in everyday ESF procedure still needs to be enhanced. The main problems identified in the previous ESF funding period are that:

- gender mainstreaming is not implemented in all phases of ESF management;
- specific actions are not emphasised enough with regard to the dual approach;
- gender mainstreaming is not prioritised and not included in all phases of ESF procedures and thematic issues.

To improve the situation, Managing Authorities and Intermediary Bodies will benefit from the work performed by the Gender CoP network since 2010. With its 13 MS members, Gender CoP was dedicated to integrating the gender dimension into ESF programming for 2014-2020. It worked towards the goal of gender mainstreaming as an integral part of ESF management – from planning, programming and implementing to monitoring and evaluation. In particular, it produced the STANDARD, the European Standard on Gender Mainstreaming within the ESF. Thanks to its clear explanations of ESF requirements and examples of good practice, the STANDARD can be used both as a guide to the implementation of gender mainstreaming and specific measures within the ESF, and as a tool to help assess and monitor existing practices – from policy to project level. For further explanation, see: <http://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=67&langId=en&newsId=8420> and <http://standard.gendercop.com>.

As acknowledged by the ESF regulation, support to social innovation contributes to making policies more responsive to social change. That is why the programming period 2014-2020 opens up much more scope to use the ESF to support social innovation. A specific priority axis of the operational programmes can be devoted to social innovation, with a 10% increase in the co-financing rate. Article 9(2)

of the ESF Regulation makes it compulsory for Member States to “identify, either in their operational programmes or at a later stage during implementation, fields for social innovation that correspond to [their] specific needs.” As a result, social innovation will be mainstreamed in a variety of policy fields covered by the ESF. More specifically, greater support should also be provided, following an experimental logic, to testing and scaling up innovative solutions to address social, employment and education needs. See: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1022> and <http://ec.europa.eu/social/keyDocuments.jsp?advSearchKey=socpolinnov&mode=advancedSubmit&langId=en&search.x=0&search.y=0> (methodological presentation of experimental “social policy innovation”).

2.4 The Thematic Networks

For each of the common themes, Thematic Networks shall be established to serve primarily as platforms for the exchange of knowledge and good practice between the stakeholders in the thematic area they relate to.

In the light of the lessons of the Learning Networks created during the previous programming period (see the list on section 6.5), one of the objectives of the new Thematic Networks is to bridge the gap between policy-makers and practitioners. This objective should be realised through a common transnational programme/calendar of calls for projects launched simultaneously in the Member States, in order to facilitate the search for partners and increase cross-border learning and exchange of practice, and also to reinforce links between networks and concrete implementation — a link which was significantly weakened in the 2007-2013 programming period.

The Thematic Networks should also ensure that the benefits of learning from each other can be felt more strongly throughout the Funds implementation chain, far beyond the management level. On the basis of the experience gained in some Member States during the 2007-2013 period, Member States are encouraged to set up ‘shadow’ thematic networks at national level, bringing together project managers and relevant stakeholders to share good practice and approaches to tackling common issues, serving both as a source of bottom-up input to transnational thematic networks and also as a top-down vector to convey developments and findings from the transnational working groups.

2.5 The EU-Level Platform

The implementation of the Common Framework will be supported by the EU-level platform stipulated in the ESF Regulation, to be established and administered by the European Commission. This will comprise:

- a number of bodies: the European Commission, technical assistance provided by AEIDL on behalf of the European Commission, Thematic Networks, and individual Managing Authorities/Intermediate Bodies;
- two tools: an EU-level partner search database, and a central transnational cooperation website. For a matrix of “who does what”, see section 6.1.

2.5.1 Bodies: roles and responsibilities

European Commission: The European Commission is responsible overall for establishing, implementing and overseeing the Common Framework, including procuring and managing the necessary technical assistance. It will also be closely involved in key processes, such as the Thematic Networks and the coordinated calls for proposals. Its approval will be needed in certain cases (e.g. the common eligibility criteria, types and timing of actions within the coordinated calls, design specifications for the EU-level partner search database and central transnational cooperation website).

Technical assistance: Daily and detailed implementation and coordination of the Common Framework is ensured by technical assistance provided by AEIDL from September 2015. Inter alia, it will support the Thematic Networks; establish and maintain the EU-level partner search database and transnationality webpages on the Europa website; support the design and roll-out of coordinated calls, including advising Managing Authorities/Intermediate Bodies and possible involvement in partner search events; engage with transnational partnerships as appropriate (e.g. for monitoring and dissemination/mainstreaming purposes at EU level); contribute to overseeing and improving the Common Framework as a whole (e.g. by gathering data for any reviews); and ensure liaison with relevant ongoing programmes, as well as consistency with previous initiatives.

Thematic Networks: Up to 10 Thematic Networks will be established, each covering one of the Common Themes, for the full implementation period of the Common Framework. Their work will be supported by the technical assistance provided by AEIDL on behalf of the European Commission. They will serve as fora for mutual learning and exchange of best practice, and also to direct and facilitate coordinat-

ed calls.² Each network will steer how its Common Theme is pursued at EU level over the financial perspective, including focusing or expanding its scope, deciding on the balance between work on mutual learning and coordinated calls, and providing policy and programme management input in relation to the latter (e.g. developing coordinated call parameters and facilitating partner search). The EU technical assistance will pay for the participation of:

- 1 official providing the ESF operational and policy perspective and 1 expert (from social partners, NGOs or academia) per Member State participating in the relevant theme;
- 1 observer from other Member States not participating in the relevant theme (with no decision rights concerning the coordinated calls);
- 3 EU-level stakeholders (social partners, NGOs and academics).

Individual Managing Authorities/Intermediate Bodies:

The EU-level platform will not function without the active participation of individual Managing Authorities/Intermediate Bodies. Their primary role will concern coordinated calls: timetabling, designing parameters, launching subsidiary national/regional calls, selecting projects, populating and using the EU-level partner search database, engaging with partner search events, approving proposed transnational partnerships, and concluding and monitoring contracts. At the same time, they will clearly have an interest in the mutual learning aspect of the Common Framework, particularly in connection with programme management related Common Themes (i.e. Governance and Public Administration, Simplification and Partnership). Managing Authorities/Intermediate Bodies will either be represented on Thematic Networks or provide input via the Managing Authority/Intermediate Body representing their Member State.

2.5.2 Stakeholder participation

The successful implementation of ESF programmes depends on building close working relationships with the various stakeholders, creating consensus between them and managing their differing perceptions and needs. These stakeholders include:

- The national, regional and local public authorities which implement labour market and social policy;
- Economic operators or employers in both larger firms and SMEs;

² With the exception of the networks for the three Common Themes Governance and Public Administration, Simplification, and Partnership, which are anticipated to primarily (if not exclusively) concern mutual learning.

- NGOs and trade unions which represent the needs of target groups identified in both labour market and social policies;
- Researchers and academics who study and comment on labour market and social trends.

These stakeholders should become involved in the management of ESF transnational working from its beginning, at both contract and Thematic Network levels. The technical assistance will support a more pervasive involvement of stakeholders in three ways:

- It will constitute a stakeholder panel bringing together the most relevant EU-level NGO umbrellas, social partners and researchers. It will consult these representatives during an annual discussion day and through bilateral or multilateral consultations on specific issues;
- It will advise the EC and Member States on the most appropriate stakeholders to participate in the Thematic Networks;
- It will encourage and support Member States to establish national (or regional) thematic networks which will act as conduits of ideas and information from the ground to EU level and vice versa.

2.5.3 Tools

EU-level partner search database: The purpose of this database is to provide all ESF projects that want to add a transnational element to their activities, with a robust, functional and user-friendly tool to enable them to find partners in other Member States. It will be established and maintained by the AEIDL technical assistance team on behalf of the European Commission.

While the primary goal will be to facilitate matching promoters of projects already selected in the context of Common Framework coordinated calls (to stimulate the formation of transnational partnerships), it will also cater to the flexible approach – e.g. through the uploading of project ideas, unsuccessful or yet to be submitted proposals, and ongoing projects. The Transnational ESF Partner Search tool will serve the projects selected under the coordinated calls for proposals, as well as the projects funded by the ESF in Member States that have adopted the flexible approach to transnationality.

The database will contain simple, concise, up-to-date and comprehensive information for partner search needs, with an emphasis on user friendliness; it will be as open as possible, in principle being accessible to all potentially interested parties.

Through the partner search database and appropriate user support, the technical assistance will meet the following requirements:

- Provide online registration of project contacts and details;
- Provide online search functionalities;
- Create and export search reports;
- Offer messaging functionality to potential partners;
- Provide practical guidance on creating a project profile for inclusion in the database;
- Provide practical guidance on partner search;
- Develop a list of FAQs.

Transnationality pages on the Europa website: The technical assistance will also establish and maintain an EU-level website bringing together all relevant information from the current and previous programming periods. It will serve as a one-stop shop for anyone interested in transnational cooperation, including all bodies comprising the EU-level platform as well as project promoters (the EU-level partner search database will be accessible via the website); as such, it will not be limited to the Common Framework, though this will be its primary focus.

2.5.4 Information flows

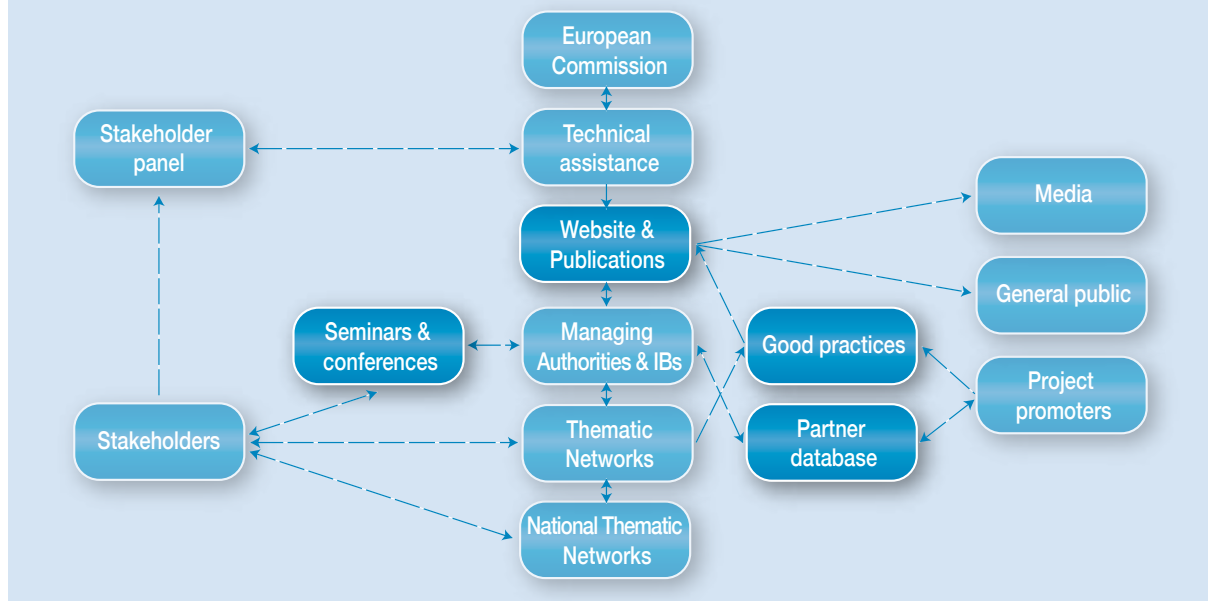
The information flows within the EU-level platform are illustrated in the diagram page 12.

2.6 The Coordinated Calls for proposals

To help project promoters to identify partners and to develop and implement transnational partnerships, two coordinated calls are planned over the programming period. These will comprise sets of national and/or regional calls launched in parallel by the Managing Authorities/Intermediate Bodies participating in the Common Framework. Each will cover relevant Common Themes and a common timetable and parameters will be agreed at EU level. Support for project promoters to find transnational partners will be provided via the EU-level partner search database and possibly by partner search events to be organised by Managing Authorities/Intermediate Bodies.

Timetable: The first coordinated calls will be published in the first semester of 2016. The indicative timing for each step is presented in section 6.2 and the constituent steps are described below. Progress on coordinated calls will be followed by the technical assistance team, reporting to the European Commission and Thematic Networks as appropriate.

The information flows within the ESF Transnational Platform



Parameters: The horizontal parameters for the coordinated calls will be standardised across all the calls. They notably concern duration, number of partners, eligibility of actions, dissemination/mainstreaming and evaluation. The horizontal parameters and a timetable have been developed by the European Commission/technical assistance and are to be presented to the ESF Committee.

Each call will also require a set of parameters related to its content, such as minimum quality standards and the implementation structure. These will be drawn up by the relevant Thematic Network.

A certain amount of flexibility will be built in so as to cater for the differing situations of participating Managing Authorities/Intermediate Bodies; for instance, steps in a coordinated call will be taken by Managing Authorities/Intermediate Bodies during agreed “windows” instead of on or by a certain date.

Development and launch of individual calls: Individual calls will be developed and launched in a coordinated way by participating national/regional Managing Authorities/Intermediate Bodies, in line with the timetable and parameters agreed. With regard to content, they may have a narrower or wider focus than a single Common Theme; indeed, it is likely that Managing Authorities/Intermediate Bodies will seek to address more than one Common Theme per individual call in order to reduce the administrative burden.

Project selection: The procedure for the project selection may vary as described below.

In a **single-step** selection process, applicants already have to know who the partners are when they submit their proposals. This allows for an early start of the project, but it obliges the project promoters in all the participating countries to build their partnership and sign a transnational cooperation agreement before they each submit their applications to their respective Managing Authorities. In this configuration, partner search and partnership development do not receive any direct financial support, but they can benefit from the EU partner search database and any partner search events organised under the aegis of the Managing Authorities.

On the other hand in a **two-step** procedure, the transnational partnership is formalised only once the project has been selected. It thus allows for the financing of a separate preparatory phase consisting of partner identification and partnership development. Project proposals can first be selected on the basis of their conceptual quality. A contractual relationship of limited duration is concluded with successful applicants thereafter. Then, once a project promoter has identified partners and formalised a transnational partnership, the initial contract is extended or followed by a second contract (*see table 4*).

Identifying partners: Project promoters will input details of their projects, in English, into the **EU-level partner**

search database, enabling them to search for suitable partners. All projects must be entered into the database, since they form the basis for recording transnational co-operation agreements. However use of the database to search for new partners is not compulsory. Use of the database will not be compulsory; equally, it will not preclude other initiatives undertaken by Managing Authorities, Intermediate Bodies or other interested parties.

Formalising transnational partnerships: As partners draw up their common project, they should include descriptions of the role and contribution of each partner, and of the method by which they will collaborate. These should be set out in a **Transnational Co-operation Agreement** signed by each partner. A template for such an agreement is available.

Funding approval: Each partner will then submit a funding application to their respective Managing Authority, attaching the transnational Co-operation agreement. The partners' projects are approved in parallel via the national selection processes.³

Orphan projects: If any of the partners' projects are rejected, then the Transnational Co-operation Agreement is

3. Each transnational partnership will comprise a number of contracts concluded between partners from different Member States and their respective Managing Authorities/Intermediate Bodies. Thus, if a trans-national partnership is made up of organisations from Greece, Poland and Spain, there will be three contracts (between the Greek, Polish and Spanish organisations and the Greek, Polish and Spanish Managing Authorities/Intermediate Bodies respectively). Relations between the partners are regulated by a separate Transnational Co-operation Agreement between the three partners.

amended. Managing Authorities may organise a clearing house process to help orphan projects find replacement partners.

Co-ordination among Managing Authorities: Managing Authorities/Intermediate Bodies from different Member States with applicants involved in establishing mutual partnerships will ensure adequate coordination amongst themselves, in particular with regard to reconciling differing opinions and rationalising procedures across jurisdictions; a space for mediation and facilitation will be provided by the technical assistance and the relevant Thematic Network. In principle, the possibility of transnational partnerships expanding or reducing their membership during implementation will be kept open in order to retain flexibility.

Monitoring, dissemination/mainstreaming and evaluation: Responsibility for monitoring, dissemination/mainstreaming and evaluation of individual contracts comprising trans-national partnerships will rest with project promoters and their respective Managing Authorities/Intermediate Bodies; in an ideal scenario, arrangements will take account of analogous requirements in place with respect to other organisations in the same partnership, thus cutting down on administration. At the level of **trans-national partnerships**, possibilities range from assigning responsibilities to a particular partner to interventions at EU level (e.g. by the technical assistance); modalities will be discussed and finalised in the context of Thematic Networks, which should also be one of the main actors in disseminating and mainstreaming project results.

Table 4: *The timeline of the coordinated calls for proposals*

	Step	Timing
1	Member States agree on common parameters	Q4 2015
2	Thematic networks discuss & adopt theme-specific parameters	Q1 2016
3	Member States develop and launch national calls – normally for complete transnational projects, or (if implementing a preparatory phase) for project ideas	Q1/2 2016
3a	<i>[optional, only if implementing a preparatory phase]</i> Project promoters submit project ideas and receive approval for the idea	Q2/Q3 2016
4	Project promoters develop projects and build partnerships (optional use of partner search database and partner search events). Transnational cooperation agreements are signed	Q2/Q3 2016
5	Project submission deadline	Sep 2016
6	Managing authorities assess projects. Managing authorities issue grant agreements	Q4 2016 – Q1 2017
7	Projects start	Q1/Q2 2017
8	Projects end	Q4 2019 – Q1 2020



3. THE FLEXIBLE APPROACH

Echoing arrangements in place for the 2007-2013 financial perspective, the design, implementation and management of transnational cooperation initiatives under the flexible approach will be completely at the discretion of Managing Authorities/Intermediate Bodies. As a result, they will not have to comply with the strictures of the Common Framework, for instance, adherence to Common Themes. Equally, however, they will generally not have access to its benefits (e.g. those supplied by the EU-level platform).⁴ The drivers of the flexible approach will therefore have to be Managing Authorities/Intermediate Bodies themselves, particularly if they wish, in line with the lessons learned from the previous programming periods, to coordinate amongst themselves to boost the quantity and quality of transnational partnerships. Such coordination may be either institutionalised or ad hoc.⁵

In certain cases Managing Authorities/Intermediate Bodies may wish to **coordinate the design, implementation and management of transnational cooperation initiatives** addressing specific themes or covering a given geographical area. To this end, they would confer on the development and launch of their calls for proposals, selection of projects, matching of partners and formation of transnational partnerships, as well as possibly on monitoring and evaluation. If they have planned sufficiently far ahead, they may even mutually consult on the shape of their OPs and constituent priority axes and measures. The result of such collaboration is a *de facto* common framework, with (a) coordinated call (or calls) at its heart.

Instead of pursuing institutionalised coordination Managing Authorities/Intermediate Bodies may cooperate **on a case-by-case basis** according to their interest and capacity. Here, planning, timing, parameters, project selection and partner search for national/regional calls are not systematically aligned prior to their launch. Typically, such ad hoc coordination involves, at a minimum, sharing information on the timing of their respective calls; it may, however, also incorporate more developed Common

Framework-type elements, such as transnational partner search events bringing together project promoters from different Member States. Though this was as far as collaboration between Managing Authorities/Intermediate Bodies went in the 2007-2013 period, the experiences gained formed a solid basis for developing aspects of the Common Framework, as well as for moving ahead to institutionalised coordination under the flexible approach.

The different instances of this institutionalised coordination during the programming period 2007-2013 were:

- EURoma: the European Network on Social Inclusion and Roma under the Structural Funds (www.euromanet.eu);
- ESFCoNet: European Social Fund Cooperation Network (www.esfconet.provincia.tn.it);
- Baltic Sea Network;
- Net@work: a network for employment.

⁴ With the exception of the EU-level partner search database and the webpages on Europa.

⁵ A third option open to Managing Authorities/Intermediate Bodies is to take no steps to coordinate with others, simply launching and managing transnational calls for proposals according to their own needs and leaving it to project promoters to identify potential partners and form partnerships.



4. SYNERGIES WITH MACRO-REGIONAL STRATEGIES

4.1 The four Macro-Regional Strategies

A Macro-Regional Strategy is an integrated framework endorsed by the European Council, which may be supported by the European Structural and Investment Funds among others, to address common challenges faced by a defined geographical area relating to Member States and third countries located in the same geographical area which thereby benefit from strengthened cooperation contributing to achievement of economic, social and territorial cohesion (article 2(31) of the Common Provision Regulation⁶).

The EU has put in place three strategies, covering several policies, which are targeted at a 'macro-region':

- The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region;
- The EU Strategy for the Danube Region;
- The EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region;

Following an invitation of the European Council, the European Commission also proposed an EU Strategy for the Alpine Region on 28 July 2015.

4.2 ESF support to Macro-Regional and Sea Basin Strategies

The Macro-Regional Strategies address challenges which are likely to be handled more satisfactorily in an integrated way. Typically, the Macro-Regional Strategies focus on a closed set of common challenges or Priority Areas.

The CPR (Article 15(2)(a)(ii) and Annex I point 7.3.) calls for Macro-Regional Strategies to be taken into account in the partnership agreements (PAs) and OPs, where appropriate. This should be done by identifying those national priorities where there is a need to cooperate with other countries, which might include areas also covered by the ESF. The same rules apply to Sea Basin Regional Strategies⁷.

The involvement of the ESF in the implementation of Macro-Regional Strategies can occur through the ESF OPs

⁶ Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of 17 December 2013.

⁷ Namely: the Baltic Sea, Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea, North Sea, the Atlantic and the Arctic Ocean.

(regional and/or national) by financing coordinated projects that relate or contribute to Macro-Regional Strategies. This is particularly the case of cross-border training programmes or exchange programmes among the regions and Member States taking part in the macro-regional strategies. These types of projects can be financed by the ESF if they are eligible and relate to the ESF thematic objectives.

Member States are encouraged to coordinate calls for projects in the Priority Areas of the Macro-Regional Strategy that match the ESF thematic objectives and the Programme Strategies defined in the OPs. However, in their relations with third countries, Member States should bear in mind the provisions of Article 13(3) ESF that limits the possibility to incur ESF expenditure outside the Union to 3% of the budget of an ESF OP or the ESF part of a multi-fund OP.

4.3 Differences between Macro-Regional Strategies and ESF transnational cooperation

Transnationality in the context of Macro-Regional Strategies differs from transnational cooperation within ESF in several respects:

- In terms of **nature**, a macro-regional strategy consists of a strategic framework which is created on the basis of a political commitment and an agreement between Member States and, sometimes, third countries. By contrast, transnational cooperation is not a political strategy. It is an instrument that is established by a legislative act (i.e. the ESF Regulation), subject to the scope and requirements set out in that legal text (Article 10);
- In terms of **objective**, a Macro-Regional Strategy is designed to address common challenges of a specific region. They thus have a regional dimension and will cover only the themes which constitute a common challenge to the geographic area covered by the Macro-Regional Strategy. On the contrary, transnational cooperation is a tool developed to facilitate the implementation of ESF policies and has, therefore, an eminent thematic di-

mension which is not linked to a specific territory. Transnational cooperation is mainly driven by the challenges which are common within a certain thematic area;

- In terms of **scope**, while the use of transnational cooperation is limited to implementing one or more of the ESF investment priorities or issues related to the management and control of programmes chosen by the Member States under their OPs, a Macro-Regional Strategy may cover areas beyond the thematic objectives set out in the CPR;
- As concerns the involvement of the **partners**: a Macro-Regional Strategy may (and normally does) involve third countries. Involvement of partners from at least two Member States is not mandatory, although all current Macro-Regional Strategies involve more than one Member State. As regards transnational cooperation, participation of partners from at least two Member States is mandatory; the involvement of partners from third countries is also possible in line with the provisions of Article 13(3) ESF when it comes to the areas falling under the thematic objectives 8 (“Promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility”) and 10 (“Investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning”);
- Regarding the **funding**, a Macro-Regional Strategy draws support from different sources of funding (not only from the European Structural and Investment Funds), while transnational cooperation under Article 10 can only be supported by the ESF.

ple by generating ideas for partnership projects, discussing common challenges, and identifying key players as potential partners and beneficiaries.

By the same token, the Managing Authorities may find it advantageous to focus transnational cooperation on specific regions or Member States by creating synergies with the Macro-Regional Strategy. This happens when these specific regions or Member States are also involved in a Macro-Regional Strategy that covers common key labour market and social inclusion challenges which also correspond to themes that can be selected for transnational cooperation.

In all these cases, transnational cooperation must fulfil the criteria of Article 10 ESF.

4.4 Synergies between Macro-Regional Strategies and transnational cooperation under Article 10 ESF

In spite of these differences, transnational cooperation under ESF OPs can be a tool to enhance the contribution of the ESF to the implementation of the existing Macro-Regional Strategies. This may happen when a Macro-Regional Strategy covers priority areas corresponding to ESF investment priorities, such as cross-border and transnational job mobility, apprenticeship schemes, educational exchange programmes, administrative capacity building and social entrepreneurship, among many others. In this situation, Member States participating in a Macro-Regional Strategy can use the resources available for transnational cooperation activities under article 10 ESF to enhance the implementation of a Macro-Regional Strategy, for exam-



5. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Readers will find below answers to some of the most frequent questions raised by Member States with regard to the implementation of transnational cooperation.

5.1 How can transnational cooperation be used to develop a cross-border labour market?

Article 10 ESF on transnational cooperation requires the involvement of partners from at least two Member States in total. By participation, however, it is not meant that Member states need to carry out the same activity or have the same benefits but rather gain experience and obtain results that can be shared and used as a basis for mutual learning to improve policy approaches and delivery systems. Therefore, to comply with this requirement, it would be sufficient that one partner in Member State A takes care of jobseekers wishing to find a job in Member State B, and that the partner in Member State B takes care of job offers in Member State B.

5.2 How can transnational cooperation contribute to promoting mobility of workers?

During the 2014-2020 period, the ESF may continue to support projects that promote mobility. These projects may be considered as transnational cooperation within the meaning of Article 10 ESF, depending on whether they aim to support mutual learning between partners from at least two Member States. This mutual learning is not limited to sending and receiving participants within the context of a mobility scheme, but it also involves other activities that allow the exchange of experience.

5.3 How should mobility projects implemented through transnational cooperation be programmed?

Mobility projects, including those implemented through transnational cooperation, may be programmed under the specific investment priority 8vii, where they concern EURES, or under any different investment priority, depending on the thematic objective to which they contribute.

5.4 How should transnational cooperation activities be included in an OP?

This depends on how transnational cooperation is programmed in the OP. Where it is programmed as a dedicated priority axis, the indicative list of activities to be supported should be included under the corresponding investment priority of the transnational cooperation priority axis, i.e. section 2.A.6.1 of the OP model as set out in Annex I of [Commission Implementing Regulation \(EU\) No 288/2014](#).

Where transnational cooperation is not programmed as a dedicated priority axis, this information should be included in section 2.A.7 as set out in Annex I of [Commission Implementing Regulation \(EU\) No 288/2014](#) of the corresponding priority axis.

5.5 What types of transnational cooperation activity can be supported?

Transnational cooperation under the ESF can cover a broad range of activities. It has to be stressed that in accordance with Article 65 of the CPR, the definition of these eligible activities falls under the responsibility of the Member States within the limits set out in the CPR and the ESF Regulation, in particular Article 10 ESF. Such activities may include:

- Exchange of information, know-how, expertise, results and good practice;
- Exchange of people, e.g. between administrations, trainers, trainees, stakeholders in labour market and social inclusion policies;
- Joint development to avoid duplication of efforts, or to benefit from complementary work;
- Review, assessment, adaptation and transfer of experience from other Member States;
- Joint action, e.g. twinning between institutions and organisations.

5.6 Is transnational cooperation between Member States and third countries permitted under the ESF Regulation?

In the ESF, transnational cooperation should involve partners from at least two Member States in total. This does

not exclude the possibility that an ESF-funded beneficiary enters into partnership with an organisation located outside the EU. However, in their relations with third countries, Member States should bear in mind the provisions of Article 13(3) ESF that limits the possibility to incur ESF expenditure outside the Union up to a limit of 3% of the budget of an ESF OP or the ESF part of a multi-fund OP when it comes to areas falling under thematic objectives 8 and 10.

5.7 Is the funding of Erasmus+ activities eligible under Article 10 ESF?

Annex I point 4.6 CPR provides that Member States shall seek to use ESI funds to mainstream tools and methods developed and tested successfully under Erasmus+ in order to maximise the social and economic impact of investment in people. The ESF may also support activities which are complementary to activities supported by Erasmus+ under one of the relevant investment priorities set out in the ESF Regulation. For instance, under the investment priority “Improving the quality of tertiary education”, the ESF may support activities to encourage the development of Erasmus activities in a university. However, these activities should be only complementary to the activities supported by Erasmus, as double funding of activities is not permitted.

Such activities may also be eligible under Article 10 ESF provided they fulfil the relevant criteria, i.e. they aim to promote mutual learning, involve partners from at least two other EU Member States and are programmed as transnational activity under the most relevant investment priority at the level of an Operational Programme.



6. APPENDICES

6.1 Roles and responsibilities of the bodies comprising the EU-level platform

	European Commission	European Commission's technical assistance	Thematic Networks	Managing Authorities/Intermediate Bodies
Membership/constitution	European Commission staff responsible for transnational cooperation	External contractor hired by European Commission	Participation obligatory for those in CF, open to others	N/A
Funding	N/A	European Commission's ESF technical assistance budget	Included in the budget for the external contractor hired by the European Commission for technical assistance	N/A
Coordinated calls	Considers, approves and issues timetable and parameters	Supports European Commission and Thematic Networks	Develop and propose timetable and parameters to European Commission	Develop and launch national/regional calls respecting agreed parameters; select projects; conclude contracts
Partner search database	Considers, comments and approves specifications	Develops and proposes specifications to European Commission; establishes and maintains	Consider and comment on specifications	Forwards proposals selected and other information to European Commission's technical assistance and/or data entry
Partner search events	Issues invitations; attends	Supports work of Thematic Networks	Organise, facilitate and provide experts	Host and finance
Central website	Considers and approves specifications	Develops and proposes specifications to European Commission; establishes and maintains	Consider and comment on specifications	N/A
Thematic Networks	Attends	Strategic orientation and secretariat	N/A	Attend and contribute

6.2 Reference documents and tools

Reference documents and tools of relevance to the transnational cooperation agenda across Member States are set out by subject area in the table below; also included

are additional descriptions (if necessary), year of issue and source. The majority of documentation cited (all of which is in English) is addressed to ESF programme managers; in certain cases, however, the target audience may include or comprise project promoters.

Subject area	Document/tool	Source
Transnational cooperation in general	Transnationality within the ESF on Europa	http://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=56
	<i>Transnationality works! If you work at it!</i> (main activities, impacts, success factors and case studies related to transnational cooperation under the 1995-2000 Community Initiatives ADAPT and EMPLOYMENT) – 1999	ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal_consolidated/data/document/i8-en.pdf
Calls for proposals	<i>Coordinated Call on Transnational Mobility Measures for Disadvantaged Youth and Young Adults and its Manual of Guidance</i> (both issued under TLN Mobility) – 2014	www.tln-mobility.eu/EN/Home/Coordinated-call/content.html
	<i>Promoting transnational cooperation</i> (to ensure proper uptake of calls for proposals) – 2011	www.transnationality.eu/intranet/activities/capacity-building/working-papers
Developing and implementing transnational partnerships	<i>Partnership without borders</i> (tools for partner search and identification, partnership success factors) – 2011	http://kiw-pokl.org.pl/images/en/partnrstwo_partnership.pdf
	<i>Transnational cooperation projects – a guide for project promoters</i> (preparing and implementing transnational partnerships) – 2009	http://kiw-pokl.org.pl/images/en/transnational_cooperation_projects.pdf
	<i>EQUAL Guide on transnational co-operation (2004-2008)</i> (guidance on developing and implementing transnational partnerships) – 2005	http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal_consolidated/about/key-doc.html
	<i>Partnership Development Toolkit</i> (EQUAL) – 2005	http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal_consolidated/about/key-doc.html
	<i>EQUAL Guide for Development Partnerships</i> – 2004	http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal_consolidated/about/key-doc.html
	Fishing pool (tool for identifying potential transnational cooperation partners) – 2011	http://kiw-pokl.org.pl/index.php?option=com_sobipro&task=search&sid=147&Itemid=266&lang=en
	Letter of intent (to be attached to applications submitted for funding) – 2010	http://kiw-pokl.org.pl/index.php?lang=en

Subject area	Document/tool	Source
Developing and implementing transnational partnerships	Model of the minimum scope of a transnational cooperation agreement – 2010	http://kiw-pokl.org.pl/index.php?lang=en
	Assessment of 2009-2012 ESF Learning Networks – 2014	http://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=67&langId=en&newsId=8379
Monitoring and evaluation	<i>Monitoring of and support to transnational cooperation projects</i> – 2012	http://www.transnationality.eu/intranet/activities/capacity-building/working-papers
	<i>Evaluating the added value of transnational cooperation</i> – 2012	http://www.transnationality.eu/intranet/activities/capacity-building/working-papers
	Ex-post evaluation of EQUAL (other evaluations of the programme available on the same page) – 2010	http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal_consolidated/about/evaluation.html

6.3 European and national contacts

Contact points for transnational cooperation are listed in the table below for the European Commission, the Com-

mon Framework technical assistance, and individual Member States. Details are valid as of June 2016; check the Europa website (<http://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=56>) for updates.

Country	Name	Surname	E-mail	Position	Phone	Institution
EUROPEAN COMMISSION	Sonia	de Melo Xavier	sonia.de-melo-xavier@ec.europa.eu	Policy assistant	+3222985480	European Commission - DG EMPL.F1: ESF & FEAD Policy and Legislation
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Belgium	Caroline	Meyers	caroline.meyers@esf.vlaanderen.be	Deputy director	+3225462234	ESF Agency Flanders
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	Jenny	Charlier	jenny.charlier@fse.be	Deputy Director	+3222343970	
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Germany	Bettina	Reuter	bettina.reuter@bmas.bund.de	Transnational Coordinator	+49228995276792	Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
	Ulrich	Wolff	ulrich.wolff@basfi.hamburg.de	Policy Officer	+4940428633229	State Ministry of Labour, Social and Family Affairs and Integration

Country	Name	Surname	E-mail	Position	Phone	Institution
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Ireland	William	McIntosh	Willie_McIntosh@education.gov.ie	Head of ESF Managing Authority	+35318892155	Department of Education & Skills
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Slovakia	Albert	Nemeth	albert.nemeth@employment.gov.sk	General director of OP Human Resources	+421220462914	Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family
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Sweden	Helena	Eklund	helena.eklund@esf.se	National Coordinator Transnationality	+46857917133	The Swedish ESF Council
United Kingdom	Angus	Gray	angus.gray@dwp.gsi.gov.uk	Head of European Social Fund Division		Department for Work and Pensions

6.4 Learning Networks in the 2007-2013 programming period

One of the European Commission's support initiatives to transnational cooperation during the 2007-2013 ESF programming period was the funding of the following list of transnational Learning Networks. These Learning Networks were intended to facilitate and strengthen transnational exchange and cooperation between the ESF managing and implementing bodies and other strategic stakeholders. Following two calls for proposals launched by the European Commission, the following Learning Networks were set up:

In 2009-2012:

- ACB: Administrative Capacity Building – Facing the Challenge – How to effectively support public administration reforms by ESF funds;
- ESF AGE: Age management network (<http://esfage.isfol.it>);
- BFSE: A Better Future for the Social Economy (<http://socialeconomy.pl/node/95>);
- Partnership: Community of Practice on Partnerships in the ESF (<http://partnership.esflive.eu>);
- COPIE: Community of Practice on Inclusive Entrepreneurship (www.cop-ie.eu);
- EMPOWERMENT: Empowerment and Inclusion (www.proteus-ni.org/eln.html);
- ExOCOP: Ex-offender Community of Practice (www.exo-cop.eu);
- Gender CoP: Community of Practice on Gender Mainstreaming (www.gendercop.com);
- IMPART: Increasing the Participation of Migrants and Ethnic Minorities in the labour market; (www.berlin.de/lb/intmig/themen/thema06/impart.html#impart_en);
- CoP RBM: Results Based Management in the ESF (www.coprmb.eu);
- SaviAV: Social inclusion and vocational integration of Asylum seekers and Victims of human trafficking;
- ENYE: European Network on Youth Employment (www.youthemploymentnet.eu).

In 2013-2014:

- European Network on AGE (Age, Generation, Experience) and Career;
- Learning Network on Transnational Mobility Measures for Disadvantaged Youth and Young Adults (www.tln-mobility.eu);
- European Community of Practice on Gender Mainstreaming within ESF 2013-2014 (www.gendercop.com);

- Learning Network on ESF Transnational Cooperation 2014-2020 ESF;
- Active Inclusion (AI) (<http://www.esf.lt/en/news/view/id.1439> and <http://www.esf.lt/uploads/documents/file/Report%20on%20the%20Marginalised%20in%20Communities%20event.pdf>);
- COP RBM+: Supporting Public Administrative Reform through the Community of Practice on Results Based Management (www.coprmb.eu);
- Social Entrepreneurship Network (SEN) (www.social-economy.pl);
- Reinforcing policy learning for Roma inclusion (www.euromanet.eu/upload/22/80/Key_Findings_and_Proposals_Joint_Report_ESF_LN_Reinforcing_Policy_Learning_for_Roma_Inclusion.pdf).

The Learning Networks aimed to generate added value for the ESF programmes and the policies which the ESF supports, and for the people and organisations taking part in its activities. On the basis of collaborative working on equal terms between partners, the Learning Networks helped to solve problems at operational and strategic levels. They provided incentives to reflect on practice and to improve it. They applied common working methods tested in other countries and regions. They gave opportunities for staff exchange. The objectives and themes selected had a high degree of relevance to ESF objectives and to other high-level EU policy drivers such as the Europe 2020 strategy. A high degree of relevance was also apparent in respect of national priorities.

However, the extent of collaboration between the Member States was overall limited. In some cases this was related to the fact that co-ordination of, or involvement in, a network required significant inputs, which reduced the time that might be available for collaboration. In others, those involved in a network felt that there would be limited value from engaging in such cross-network activity. Finally, the economic crisis affected the thematic priorities or activities developed.

6.5 EU legal provisions regarding ESF transnational cooperation 2014-2020

Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions ...

(OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 320–469)

ANNEX I

COMMON STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

7.4 Transnational cooperation under the ESF

1. Member States shall seek to address policy areas identified in the relevant Council recommendations in order to maximise mutual learning.
2. Member States shall, where appropriate, select the themes for transnational activities and establish appropriate implementation mechanisms in accordance with their specific needs.

Regulation (EU) No 1304/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on the European Social Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1081/2006

(OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 470–486)

Whereas:

(...)

(21) Transnational cooperation has significant added value and should therefore be supported by all Member States with the exception of duly justified cases taking account of the principle of proportionality. It is also necessary to reinforce the Commission's role in facilitating exchanges of experience and coordinating implementation of relevant initiatives.

Article 10

Transnational cooperation

1. Member States shall support transnational cooperation with the aim of promoting mutual learning, thereby increasing the effectiveness of policies supported by the ESF. Transnational cooperation shall involve partners from at least two Member States.
2. By way of derogation from paragraph 1, Member States with a single operational programme supported by the ESF or a single multi-fund operational programme may exceptionally choose not to support transnational cooperation actions, in duly justified cases and taking account of the principle of proportionality.

3. Member States, in partnership with the relevant partners, may select themes for transnational cooperation from a list of common themes proposed by the Commission and endorsed by the Committee referred to in Article 25 or select any other themes corresponding to their specific needs.
4. The Commission shall facilitate transnational cooperation on the common themes of the list referred to in paragraph 3 and, where appropriate, other themes selected by Member States, through mutual learning and coordinated or joint action. In particular, the Commission shall operate an EU-level platform to facilitate the setting up of transnational partnerships, the exchange of experiences, capacity building and networking, and the capitalisation on and the dissemination of the relevant outcomes. In addition, the Commission shall develop a coordinated implementation framework, including common eligibility criteria, types and timing of actions, and common methodological approaches for monitoring and evaluation, with a view to facilitating transnational cooperation.

Article 11

Fund-specific provisions for operational programmes

1. By way of derogation from Article 96(1) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, operational programmes may set out priority axes for the implementation of social innovation and transnational cooperation as referred to in Articles 9 and 10 of this Regulation.
2. By way of derogation from Article 120(3) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, the maximum co-financing rate for a priority axis shall be increased by ten percentage points, but shall not exceed 100 % where the whole of a priority axis is dedicated to social innovation or to transnational cooperation, or a combination of both.
3. In addition to the provision made in Article 96(3) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, operational programmes shall also set out the contribution of planned ESF-supported actions to: (a) the thematic objectives listed under points (1) to (7) of the first paragraph of Article 9 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 by priority axis, as appropriate; (b) social innovation and transnational cooperation, as referred to in Articles 9 and 10 of this Regulation, where they are not covered by a dedicated priority axis.

Article 25

Committee under Article 163 TFEU

6. The ESF Committee shall:

(...)

(c) endorse the list of common themes for transnational cooperation provided for in Article 10(3).

TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION IN THE ESF 2014-2020, an introductory guide (version 2 - November 2015)

This guide sets out the rationale for transnational co-operation in the ESF and describes the components of the Common Framework established in the 2014-2020 period to remedy the shortcomings experienced in the previous period. These include the common themes, the co-ordination of calls for proposals, the thematic networks and the EU-level platform. It also covers the possibilities of the flexible approach, the mainstreaming of gender and social innovation, and how the ESF can contribute to Macro-Regional Strategies. It concludes with answers to frequently asked questions, references, a list of National Contact Points and an extract from the relevant legislation.

This publication is available in electronic format in English.

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