Partnership Learning Manual

January 3rd, 2012

Acknowledgements

FOREWORD PARTNERSHIP LEARNING MANUAL

In 2010, the European Commission launched the EU 2020 Strategy with the goal to deliver smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

This growth, however, can only be achieved by working on the innovation and modernisation of Member State's social policies i.e. by strengthening the promotion of processes of mutual learning, communication, transfer of best practices and support in policy design.

Through the European Social Fund (ESF) transnational dimension, the Commission has facilitated a "reflective exercise" over the opportunities to access new ideas, innovative approaches and new skills hinging on the sharing of experiences across borders (whether national, regional or organisational).

By working on the partnership principle, the transnational aspects of mutual learning and mainstreaming of best practices into policies have been implemented into the national and regional Operational Programmes in all Member States and/or regions participating in the ESF Learning Networks.

This transnational exchange and cooperation between ESF Managing Authorities, implementation bodies and strategic stakeholders has improved the optimization of financial resources – and mostly – the enhancement of professional and social ones.

The ESF Learning Network on 'Community of Practice on Partnership in the ESF' (COP) has made a paramount contribution in this regard by: expanding the knowledge about Member States and regions; implementing partnerships and providing contacts of the highly experienced participants to the network; reflecting on the-same-eye-level and recommending improvements for 'the partnership work' experienced colleagues; strengthening the joint efforts of further development of policies in respect of partnerships adopted by Operational Programmes, policies and actions of Member States.

The promotion of continuous learning within the COP Network through the 'critical friend' review method has brought a substantial added value to the stimulation of a more creative partnership thinking and implementation of structural funds, in particular to the ESF.

The Commission has greatly acknowledged the important contribution of the COP Network and feels particularly happy for the excellent work it has delivered. In particular, the Commission has highly appreciated the efforts that the COP Network has put forward as far as the good governance and the optimisation of structural funds is concerned.

The Commission is convinced that the seeds sowed during the activity of the COP Network will contribute to collect fruitful achievements in the forthcoming ESF Programming Period 2014-2020 especially as far as the reinforced provisions on Partnership are concerned in order to strengthen good governance with the involvement of all relevant territorial and socio-economic actors, in particular the social partners and non-governmental organisations.

Szilárd TAMÁS
Head of Unit F/1, Geographical and Financial support, Thematic reporting, CELFI
European Commission, Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

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Introduction

This Manual provides information on the key outputs of the transnational learning network **Community of Practice (COP) on Partnership in the ESF**. The network focussed on partnership approaches being adopted under national and regional ESF Operational Programmes of EU Member States. This transnational cooperation ensured knowledge exchange among ESF Managing Authorities and Intermediate Bodies as well as other stakeholders.

The COP core members consisted of ESF Managing Authorities and Intermediate Bodies from nine EU Member States:

- **Austria**: Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection
- **Belgium/Flanders**: ESF Agency Flanders
- **Germany**: Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and gsub - Projektegesellschaft mbH
- **Greece**: Ministry of Employment and Social Protection
- **Hungary**: National Development Agency and Ministry for National Economy
- **Ireland**: Pobal
- **Poland**: Cooperation Fund Foundation
- **Portugal**: Human Potential Operational Programme (POPH)
- **Romania**: Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection

Although not a COP member, Sweden was also involved in the COP's activities with the Swedish ESF Council assuming observer status.

Over a period of three years COP members intensively exchanged learning about different ways of implementing partnerships through consideration of Partnership Practices, Effects and Opportunities (PEOs):

- **PARTNERSHIP PRACTICES** of Member states at all levels of governance, in particular at the programme level;
- **EFFECTS** on policies as well as impacts for ESF target groups achieved via the partnership approach practiced in the specific Member States; and
- **OPPORTUNITIES** for improving policy planning and delivery for both the visited/reviewed Member states as well as the reviewers from other Member States (in particular for ESF Managing Authorities).

PEO explorations were conducted in seven Member States: Austria, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Hungary, Portugal and Sweden. COP meetings and PEO explorations were the core activities for identifying and sharing good practice. Central to PEOs was a "critical friend"

review model in which visiting COP members worked together with their hosts as equals in a reciprocal relationship that promoted continuous learning.

The major outcomes of the COP's work include:

- **PEO Key Lessons reports** with information on the results achieved through the implementation of partnerships in seven Member States;
- **Communiqué on partnerships** - a joint statement on partnerships (see Chapter 5);
- The **COP portal** (http://partnership.esflive.eu/) including the **database on partnership experiences** (http://partnership.esflive.eu/node/223);
- The **International Partnership Conference**, which took place between 11 – 12 October 2011 in Vienna, Austria, where good practice examples of partnership practices adopted by Managing Authorities at programme level were presented; and:
- This **Partnership Learning Manual** highlighting the final outputs of the COP.

The Partnership Learning Manual summarises the lessons learnt by the COP network during the project period. By sharing the Partnership Learning Manual with our colleagues we aim to assist Managing Authorities and other programme managers to further develop and intensify their partnership approaches and, wherever appropriate, utilise partnerships in order to enhance policy outcomes.

Core members of the Community of Practice on Partnership in the ESF
December 2011

Glossary

BMASK	Austrian Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection
COP	Community of Practice on Partnership in the European Social Fund
EC	European Commission
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
EU	European Union
IB	Intermediate Body
KSFF	Key Success Factor Framework
LDC	Local Development Company
MA	Managing Authority
MC	Monitoring Committee
MS	Member State
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OP	Operational Programme
PEO	Practices, Effects and Opportunities
ROP	Regional Operational Programme
RP	Regional Partnership
SFP	Structural Fund Partnership
TA	Technical Assistance
TEP	Territorial Employment Pact
ZSI	Centre for Social Innovation

Community of Practice on Partnership in the ESF

1. Partnership learning – the COP approach

Between 2009 and 2011, the Community of Practice on Partnership in the ESF (COP) carried out a range of activities in order to explore how the concept of partnership was being applied in the national and regional Operational Programmes (OPs) of different Member States. This chapter provides an overview of the COP's definition of the term "partnership" and outlines the methodology used to explore partnership application in EU Member States.

1.1 Definition of partnership

European Social Fund (ESF) regulations regarding partnership refer both to the involvement of stakeholders, including social partners, in the governance mechanisms of OPs, as well as to the provision of financial support to multi-actor projects.[1] One of the COP's main tasks was to draw upon these different understandings to develop a working definition of partnership that combined a governance and project level focus, and that, while specific to the ESF, was also broad enough to endorse a flexible interpretation in different Member States. Following a lengthy consultation process, the following definition was agreed upon:

Partnership is a dynamic and complementary relationship between diverse actors in which added value is achieved by working together rather than alone.

In the ESF partnerships are used to support policy linkages that promote growth and prosperity across the EU by reducing economic, social and territorial disparities through:

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

The COP definition of partnership is in line with existing interpretations of the concept in different Member States. Some examples include:

Austria: Territorial Employment Pacts (TEPs) are contractual regional partnerships that seek to integrate labour market and employment policies with other policy areas.

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[1] European Commission, *The principle of partnership in the new ESF programmes (2007-13), A Framework for Programming*, Unit B4 June 2006

Ireland: The partnership approach centres on devolution of funding and service delivery to local partnership and community structures such as Local Development Companies (LDCs).

Sweden: Structural Fund Partnerships (SFPs) operate at regional level to address national strategic priorities through regional competitiveness, entrepreneurship and employment.

1.2 The Key Success Factor Framework
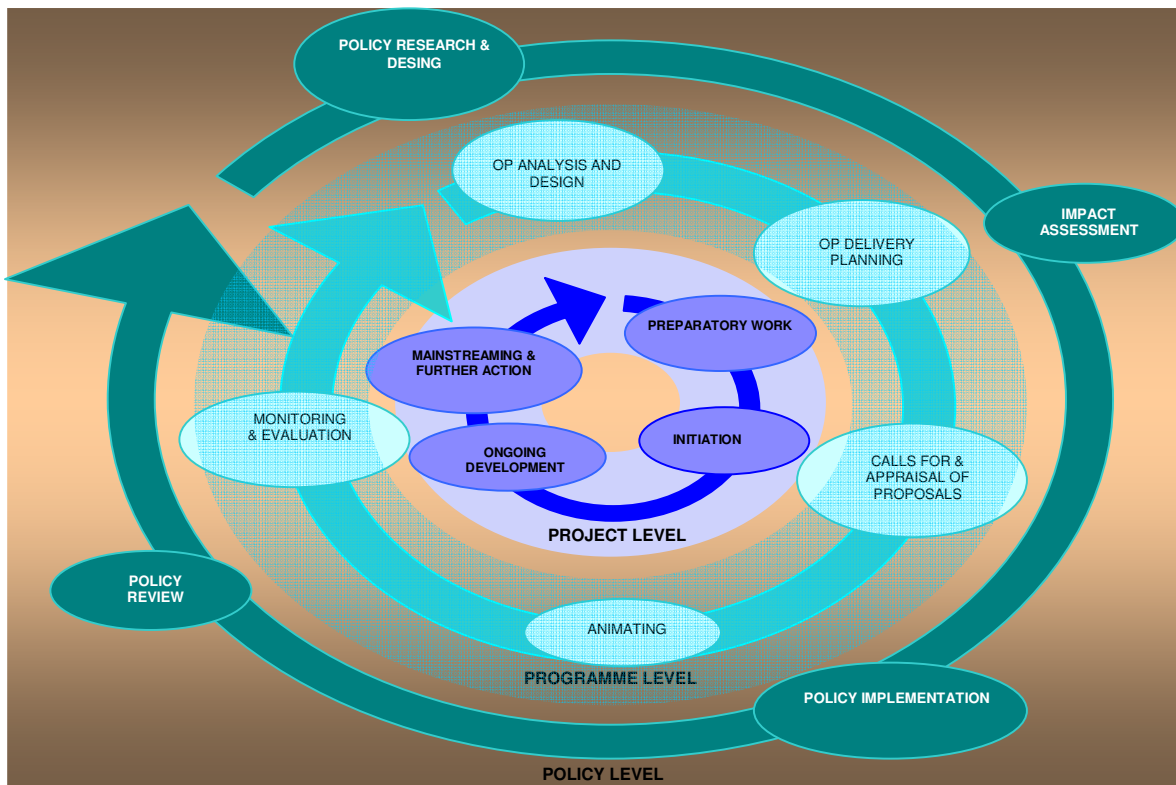
Figure 1: Key Success Factor Framework
Source: Leda Stott, COP Partnership Expert (from Guidebook-How ESF Managing Authorities and Intermediate Bodies Support Partnership, 2008)

The COP used the Key Success Factor Framework (KSFF) as the basis for exploring how the partnership principle is being implemented in ESF Operational Programmes (OPs). The KSFF was developed by members of the first Community of Practice on Partnership in the ESF (2006-8).

Positioning the Operational Programme (OP) planning and implementation cycle between policy and project level cycles, the KSFF seeks to demonstrate how partnership can be

endorsed by Managing Authorities and Intermediate Bodies at both governance and project level throughout five phases:

1. Operational Programme Analysis and Design;
2. Operation Programme Delivery Planning;
3. Calls For and Appraisal Of Proposals;
4. Animation during Project Implementation; and,
5. Monitoring and Evaluation.

1.3 PEO Explorations

In order to explore the different forms of partnership being adopted by national and regional Operational Programmes, as well as the policies and actions of Member States and regions, the COP adopted a PEO methodology. A PEO exploration is a form of peer review that examines:

- **P:** Partnership **P**ractices of Member States/regions at all levels of governance, in particular the programme level;
- **E**: **E**ffects on policies as well as impacts for ESF target groups achieved via the partnership approach practiced in the specific Member State/region; and
- **O**: **O**pportunities for improving policy planning and delivery for both the visited Member State/region as well as the Member States/regions from which the reviewers come (in particular for ESF Managing Authorities/MAs).

PEO explorations were organised as two-day on-the-spot exchanges with a standard agenda (see Table 1). During each visit the specific country situation of the chairing Member State was outlined alongside the PEOs to be explored. Partnership approaches implemented in the Member State, practised in the form of territorial alliances or as a governance mechanism, were surveyed, in addition to key lessons learnt from such practices for visiting Member State representatives.

The role of "critical friend" was central to PEOs. The principle of this model is that, rather than evaluators, visiting COP members (or peers) work together with their hosts as equals in a reciprocal relationship that promotes continuous learning. Critical friends use two complementary approaches: (i) they generate information through discussions that offer new perspectives or ideas and (ii) they ask challenging questions or suggest possible changes. By acknowledging one another's unique contributions and engaging in constructive dialogue the PEO exploration process thus promoted the production of new knowledge and insights.

There were usually between 10-30 participants in each PEO exploration, including various stakeholders from the host country who, in the interests of promoting wider awareness and understanding of the practice/s explored, were invited to attend Day One. These stakeholders included members of other MAs e.g. from the European Regional Development Fund

(ERDF), local/regional partnership managers, politicians, social partner and NGO representatives.

Time	Day One
Afternoon session	Opening by host Member State • Introduction to partnership approach/es adopted by the OP/s of the Member State • Presentation of one or two good practices: information in respect of the partnership framework, e.g. "How are partnerships promoted by the ESF and/or other programmes?" (including effects and opportunities from the point of view of the Managing Authority and a partnership practice from the 'ground' (local /regional level) • Discussion on efforts taken in the Member State Closing session by ESF Managing Authority
	Day Two
Morning session	PEO exploration by reviewers (without external participants from Day 1) Discussion/debate on PEO Key Lessons learnt for the host Member States <u>and</u> participating COP members/Member States
Afternoon session	Short presentation of the Key Lessons to the Member State Assessment of the PEO exploration Closure

Table 1: Agenda of the PEO exploration

After the visits a PEO Key Lessons Report was issued with detailed information on the partnership activities in the Member State, discussion of their effects and opportunities, recommendations for the host country, and lessons learnt by visiting COP members.

PEO explorations were conducted by the COP in seven Member States: Austria, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Hungary, Portugal and Sweden. The partnership approaches encountered in these Member States are outlined below (for full details see Annex 1).

- **Austria**: Territorial Employment Pacts (TEPs) - contracted regional partnerships to better link employment policy with other policies in order to improve the employment situation at regional and local level.
- **Germany**: "T model" combining horizontal partnerships at federal level with vertical partnerships initiated at federal level but addressing regional and local levels.
- **Greece**: Mainstreaming of EQUAL programme principles to promote greater empowerment and social cohesion at local level.
- **Hungary**: Emphasis on the added value of partnership and stakeholder engagement, with special focus on the local level.
- **Ireland**: Local partnership and community emphasis to reinforce grassroots links and gender equity.
- **Portugal**: Macro, meso and micro level approaches with two forms of partnership at meso and micro level: Type A: 'formal' projects - developed in partnership with defined access to financing and management; and Type B: 'informal' partnerships - based on logic of coordinated work.

- **Sweden**: Regional focus with emphasis on improved governance through engagement of politicians. Structural Fund Partnerships (SFPs) act as selection bodies for "cooperation projects" operating at multiple levels.

At the end of each PEO visiting COP members commented on their learning from the visit and what they would take back to their own countries as a result. This allowed for detailed reflection and feedback and has led to ongoing exchanges between countries around the development of new models and processes.

Lessons for ESF Managing Authorities

Partnership approaches should be:

Based upon a clear understanding of national settings and policy challenge,

Discussed and defined with stakeholders, and

Communicated clearly and succinctly.

2. Lessons from practice

2.1 Key partnership features

In exploring different partnership models and procedures, the COP identified a set of key partnership features across different Member States. These features related to choices around: levels of formality; sources of funding; project size; and the nature of implementation approaches.

2.1.1 Formal / informal approaches

COP Member States adopted both formal (where partners sign binding agreements) and informal approaches (with flexible arrangements between partners). The advantages and disadvantages of each model were highlighted as:

Formal approach	Informal approach
Advantages	
Clear framework and rules for working together	Flexibility
Greater partner responsibility	Greater participation
Legal power	Greater creativity /innovation
Results orientation	Nearer to real problems of citizens
Links to regional strategies	Local level emphasis
Ability to influence policy	
Increased visibility	
Improved monitoring	
Disadvantages	
Too much emphasis on resources	Unclear focus
Excessive administration	Poor definition of roles and responsibilities
Inflexibility	

Table 2: Formal and informal approaches

As ESF rules define eligibility but leave local partnerships free to decide how they would like to implement their work, a combination of both formal and informal approaches is possible. However COP members noted that combining formal and informal approaches is a challenge, and most partnership models have adopted a highly formal approach.

Formal requirements are applied in **Sweden** *for Structural Fund Partnerships (SFPs) where, according to national law, municipal and regional politicians must compose at least 50 percent of the membership. Cooperation projects, however, are not at present required to sign formal agreements.*

In **Flanders (Belgium)** *the level of formality depends on the specific call for proposals. In some cases, a letter of intent signed by the partners involved in a proposal is required, while in other cases a partnership agreement is obligatory after a proposal is approved. There is currently no guidance/template on what should be included in such an agreement.*

In **Hungary** *most support is given to partnerships that have legally binding agreements but there is no national law in place governing partnership implementation. In many cases partners simply submit a written declaration outlining their intent to work together and, after being given a grant for project implementation, prepare a more detailed partnership agreement outlining tasks/roles.*

*In **Germany** an OP Steering Committee has to be installed within the three months of formal OP approval. Each OP has a Chairman and Deputy and written standing orders with instructions on structure, functions and decision-making processes. Signing up to these procedures is not a legal requirement but is considered as binding.*

*In **Portugal** if working in partnership is a chosen option, national ESF regulations stipulate the signing of a contract for Type A partnerships, with information on the partnership's constitution, formalisation tool/s and working methodology. For Type B partnerships a protocol is required which includes information on the lead partner, budgets and certification of training providers, verification of general requirements for beneficiary entities, and organisation of accounting and technical/pedagogical processes.*

2.1.2 Single/combined source funding

Single source funding, where all funding comes from the Operational Programme or via co-funding from Structural Funds, is the main model used by COP Member States to provide financial support for partnership structures. Nonetheless, both single and combined source funding (supplementing single sources with other forms of funds) are used for partnership projects. While combined funding is clearly recognised as more deeply reinforcing the partnership principle, there is acknowledgement that it is more of a challenge to manage and administer.

Single source funding	Combined source funding
Advantages	
Less reporting and administration	Greater sustainability
Enhanced efficiency	Enhanced funding
Clear knowledge	Greater cooperation among stakeholders
Participation from poor communities	Innovation
	Ownership
	Shared responsibility
	Diversity of learning
Disadvantages	
Limited scope	Administrative burden and costs
	Management of different timetables and reports

Table 3: Advantages and disadvantages of single/combined source funding

*In **Austria** the pacts have shown that a predetermined organisational structure is essential for effective activities. For this reason the support structure is offered within the framework of the Austrian OP Employment 2007-2013 (ESF) on an intensified basis via a specific focus (Priority 5 of the OP). However, the implementation of TEP projects is funded by many different TEP partner sources, ranging from the contributions of the Federal Provinces, the Public Employment Service, social partners and municipalities.*

2.1.3 Large/small projects

A mix of partnership sizes exists across COP Member States. Some OPs have developed large-scale projects (> EUR 50.000), others small-scale projects (< EUR 50.000) and some countries use a mix of project sizes.

Large projects	Small projects
Advantages	
Wider impact	Great inclusiveness
Greater visibility	Nearer to local end users
Enhanced innovation	Enhanced innovation/experimentation
Global political approach	
Disadvantages	
Detached and lacking grassroots links	Limited effects on policy
Greater risk if they fail	Lower capacity
Less "real" engagement	High admin costs in relation to output

Table 4: Advantages and disadvantages of large/small projects

Small partnerships projects are viewed as being more participatory and closer to real needs. Larger projects however are seen as having greater impact and reach. Interestingly, both large and small project models are viewed as offering greater possibilities for innovation.

In **Germany** the ESF Social Partner guidelines - Weiter bilden / Initiative for Further Professional Training - were developed by the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in cooperation with the Confederation of German Employer Organisations and the Confederation of German Trade Unions. The programme began in 2007 with funding of EUR 140 million for the whole programming period. It aims to enhance cooperation between social partners, employees and enterprises in order to help workers and enterprises to adapt to changing circumstances in the German economy. The programme's target groups include social partners and enterprises. Social partners are fully involved in all steps of the programme cycle and contribute to the development of the programme and its projects.

In **Ireland** Pobal is carrying out the implementation of the Equality for Women Measure (EWM) on behalf of the Gender Equality Division in the Department of Justice and Equality. The focus of the measure during the period 2010-13 is on making funding available to support positive actions in three strands: (1) Access to employment; (2) Development of female entrepreneurship; and (3) Career development for women in employment. Target groups include women aged 18+ who are: newly unemployed, returning to work, long-term unemployed, early school leavers, in employment or business, in leadership/management roles and/or experiencing multiple disadvantages. An open call in May 2010 offered funding of up to EUR 50,000 per year per project (for one or more years) for clearly targeted projects that fostered gender equality through the delivery of practical customised development support.

In **Sweden** larger projects are highly supported within current planning because of their potential for wider impact. Livsval (Life Choices) is a three year cooperation project (2009-2011) between community organisations, state agencies and local municipalities to develop new models combining best practices from the public sector and voluntary sectors. Target groups include men and women in the Stockholm region who have difficulties accessing the labour market due to a history of drug addiction, criminality or mental health problems. The lead partner is Alma Folkhögskola (Folk High School), an adult education organisation. The project's consortium consists of the City of Stockholm (14 District Councils), the Local Government partnership for improving social services and labour market practices (KNUT), Stockholm County Council, the Swedish Public Employment Service, the Social Insurance Board, the Swedish Prison and Probation Service, and a number of other voluntary organisations. The project's activities include individual planning, the development of a model for integrated rehabilitation, close cooperation with social work cooperatives, and transnational working through the European Social Franchising Network (ESFN).

2.1.4 Bottom-up/top-down approaches

Leading partnerships from "above" involves ESF MAs providing firm direction and guidance on appropriate approaches. Such approaches need to be balanced by efforts to ensure that partnerships are also developed at grassroots levels and local ownership is promoted. In COP Member States, even though the merits of a bottom-up approach are clearly recognised, balancing this with a top-down approach has proved challenging.

Top-down approaches	Bottom-up approaches
Advantages	
Less time required for implementation	Clarity of purpose
Go further in setting conditions for cooperation than partners would do voluntarily	Meeting and understanding real needs
Clear framework and rules	Deeper and wider stakeholder engagement,
Better linking to national planed resources.	Higher chances for long-lasting change and sustainability
Strong framework for action	Clearer roles, tasks and functions since they are defined by all partners from the start
Disadvantages	
Detached from realities of target groups	Time to build and develop
May become bureaucratic	May not be in line with national framework.
Less commitment of partners	May lose momentum and focus.
Less freedom and space in actions	

Table 5: Advantages and Disadvantages of Top-down/Bottom-up approaches

In **Portugal** the Partnerships for Qualification/New Opportunities Initiative (CNO) was launched in December 2005 and is now implemented by the Human Potential Operational Programme (POPH. The Initiative provides opportunities for young people to complete upper secondary level by promoting vocational education and training courses. At the same time a new opportunity is offered to the adult population to improve and complete their qualifications through the validation of prior learning or through training. The New Opportunities Initiative is implemented by partnerships between the administration and/or the private sector and/or the non-profit sector through institutions such as secondary schools, training centres, large enterprises, public institutions, unions, social partners, and organisations focusing on disabled people and immigrants at local level. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity manage the Initiative which is coordinated by the National Agency for Qualification (ANQ). The ANQ has developed a system of recognition, validation and certification of competences. The goal is to ensure that 650,000 adults obtain certification of competences and 350,000 adults join vocational and training courses.

In **Hungary** the Programme for the Most Disadvantaged Micro-Regions (LDMR/LHH) began in 2008. It is aimed at the country's 33 most depressed micro-regions in which 10% of the population live (30% of them from the Roma community). In these regions the average income per head amounts to 55- 60% of the national average and the unemployment rate is 2.5-3% higher than the national average. The Programme is focussed on economic development, employment and Roma integration and encompasses key priority areas such as education, employment, housing and health. Promoting local development through a place-based, bottom-up and participative approach is viewed as ensuring an integrated development approach that harmonises management across different levels.

In **Germany** the Local Empowerment Programme (SvO) emerged from the success of the Local Social Capital (LOS) programme which began in 1998 to develop bottom-up initiatives that promoted employment and social cohesion. The SvO programme, which has been developed with the Federal Ministry for Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, aims to develop and establish a stable structure for working closely with people who want to carry out micro-level projects but lack adequate support for this and, to date, have been largely overlooked

within the framework of traditional ESF interventions. Target groups include youngsters and women aged 25 and under, and the programme addresses both deprived areas in German cities and remote rural areas. The objectives of the SvO programme are to facilitate the reintegration of particularly disadvantaged people back into the workforce by utilising local resources such as networks, enterprises, committed people, local authority departments and special schemes, and to promote micro-projects at local level that will continue to have an impact beyond the duration of the LOS/ SvO programme. By working in this way it is hoped that the participation of stakeholders and/or committed citizens in local decision-making will be increased, equal opportunities supported, and tolerance and democracy strengthened.

*In **Greece** the Regional Operational Program (ROP) of Crete and the Aegean Islands has directed ESF funding towards social services and social assistance programmes supporting employment and equal opportunities for men and women; vocational training programmes aimed at assisting the growth of human resources; local initiatives for employment and job creation and technical assistance for programme implementation. The principles of locality, partnership and an integrated bottom-up approach have been central to the ROP. These principles are manifested in local informal partnerships or "collaborative partner groups" which have undertaken responsibility for the planning and implementation of integrated interventions.*

2.1.5 Horizontal/vertical implementation

Partnership models can be implemented horizontally, by cooperating across similar levels e.g. between national and federal institutions and ministries; or vertically, through connections between national, regional and local levels. In some countries, partnerships are being developed at the local or regional level with formal agreements among partners at the national level. Other models are characterised by a 'full-matrix' approach with formal and informal agreements between partners at different levels. Cooperation across multiple levels is often managed by an Intermediate Body.

Horizontal focus	Vertical focus
Advantages	
Synergies between players at same level	Local involvement/ownership is greater
Avoidance of duplication	Reinforces mainstreaming of results

Table 6: Advantages of horizontal/vertical focus

***Austrian** Territorial Employment Pacts (TEPS) are required to contribute to the improved aligning of objectives between local, sub-regional, regional, national and international levels by ensuring that their activities promote multi-level governance processes across sectors and levels. These activities include sub-regional round tables between actors at the different levels of involvement which are organised by TEPs, and content-related workshops ('Policy interface colloquia') organised by the national TEP coordination unit (Kooo).*

*In **Germany** the partnership principle is being implemented by a number of federal programmes and initiatives within the ESF in what can be described as a "T model" incorporating so called "horizontal" and "vertical" partnerships.*
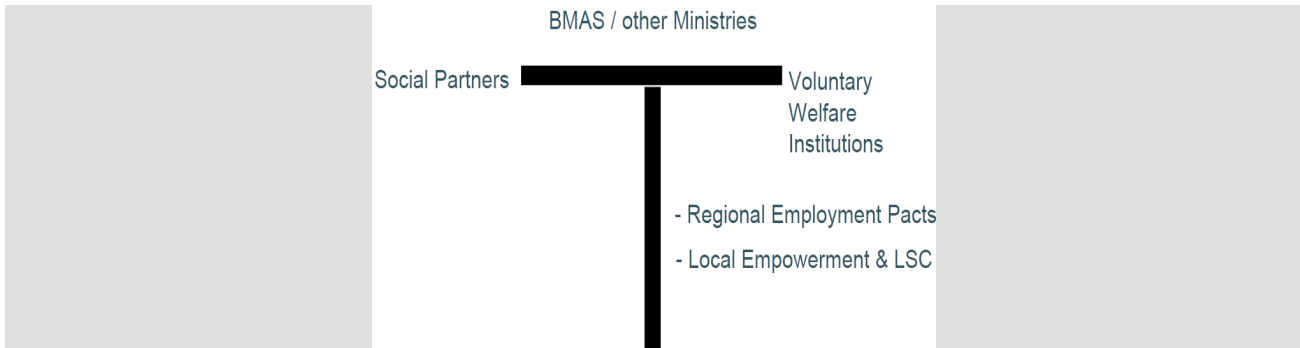
"Horizontal partnerships" work at federal level with the involvement of five federal ministries so as to ensure joint programming and delivery throughout the programme cycle with key stakeholders such as social partners (Weiter bilden) and voluntary welfare organisations (Rückenwind), NGOs and others. "Vertical partnerships" meanwhile operate as multi-level partnerships, initiated at federal level but addressing regional and local levels. These include projects such as "Perspective 50plus" and the "Local Empowerment Programme" (Stärken vor Ort SVO).

2.2 Burning issues

During PEO explorations, COP members encountered a number of "burning issues" common to the promotion of partnership in all Member States. Central to these are the **time, patience and openness** needed to build social capital, good governance and participation through partnership, particularly at local level. Other key issues and challenges, and the solutions developed in Member States to address them, are described below.

Issue /challenge	Solutions /examples
Flexibility and accountability Partnerships face a constant tension between the need to find the space for creativity and respect for the autonomy of different partners, while also ensuring that clear rules and procedures are in place to reinforce accountability, particularly in relation to financial management. The key questions for COP members was: How can ESF partnerships develop and maintain strong systems for internal coordination and external legitimacy while also being flexible, innovative and respectful of the autonomy of diverse members?	*Ireland: Partnership arrangements explicitly state and guarantee the principle of "Accountable Autonomy" which enables partner organisations to balance their commitments to the communities that they serve with full accountability to funders. This offers the opportunity for needs to be met locally while responding to national policies and priorities, maximising impact and minimising waste and duplication.* *Portugal: Two forms of partnership project have been established at meso and micro level in order to address the accountability/flexibility balance: Type A - 'formal' and highly accountable projects developed in partnership with defined access to financing and management, and Type B - 'informal' and more flexible partnerships based on the logic of coordinated work.* *Germany: The use of multi-stakeholder Steering Committees for each OP provides an interesting governance model for partnerships. These structures appear to balance accountability and flexibility by incorporating the contributions and viewpoints of different stakeholders, ensuring commitment and ownership,*

	and encouraging transparency.
Stakeholder engagement Ensuring stakeholder engagement in ESF partnership arrangements requires concerted efforts to bring in particular groups and sectors that may lack adequate capacity, information or interest in working in partnership e.g. target groups, small NGOs or the private sector. Promoting improved stakeholder participation and a sense of ownership require advocacy efforts that inform stakeholders about the benefits of partnership, as well as a clear understanding of the incentives that promote interest in working in collaboration.	***Hungary***: *The stakeholder consultation process reinforces ownership at various levels of the system by providing avenues for receiving and responding to stakeholder feedback.* ***Ireland***: *Emphasis is placed on the most disadvantaged by responding to local needs and building grassroots connections in order to bring the state closer to beneficiaries.*
Partnership broker/intermediary organisations In many ESF partnership arrangements, an intermediary organisation able to bring different stakeholders together and support collaborative efforts plays a vital role. This role may be assumed by a coordination unit working with ESF MAs, or by other organisations involved in partnership projects. Greater investigation of this "broker" role is required in order to understand the particular qualities and skills used by these intermediary organisations, as well as their particular contributions at different phases of the programme cycle.	***Austria:*** *The TEP Coordination Unit, Kooo, has assisted the involvement of actors in the labour market and successfully linked employment, economic and social policy areas at regional, sub-regional and local levels.* ***Germany:*** *Gsub-Projektegesellschaft mbH is a non-profit organisation that develops and realises innovative projects in the fields of economic, employment and labour market policy. It administers publicly funded projects from both ESF and national sources and advises Ministries and public bodies in the field of active labour market policies.* ***Ireland:*** *Two ESF programmes are administered by Pobal on behalf of the Department of Justice and Equality. Pobal is a non-profit organisation that delivers and manages programmes which promote social inclusion, reconciliation and equality through integrated social and economic development within communities. In total, Pobal manages 17 programmes for 7 Government Departments/Boards and in 2010 distributed approximately EUR 320 million.*
Monitoring and evaluation Building in systematic monitoring and evaluation systems at both programme and project levels to assess the performance and effectiveness of partnership is vital. Monitoring and evaluation systems need to demonstrate the added value of working in partnership for partners, stakeholders and	***Ireland:*** *A live IT, planning and monitoring system has been developed for Local Development Companies. This requires them to input data on their progress at regular intervals. This system, coupled with oversight by Pobal case workers who are responsible for up to 5 local-level partnerships, ensures that problems are picked up early and addressed rapidly. It is also made clear that non-compliance will be sanctioned. Such a system offers an interesting model for ESF OPs.*

target groups. Review processes also need to be clearly understood by partnership projects with clarity around timeframes and expectations, as well as opportunities for stakeholder input. Furthermore, gaps in the integration of local level feedback at regional and national level should be addressed through efforts that link learning from reviews and assessments back into practice.	
Linkages and mainstreaming A partnership's results (rather than the partnership itself) should be sustainable. Both horizontal and vertical mainstreaming are important for sustainability. Horizontal mainstreaming transfers lessons to similar organisations as well as between Member States and regions, while vertical mainstreaming ensures that results are adapted in policy and practice at institutional, political, regulatory and administrative levels. In order to improve the impact of partnerships at policy level and assist mainstreaming, linkages and connections across local, regional, national and transitional levels should be further developed. Proactive information exchange across multiple levels will deepen awareness and capacity about how partnerships function and enable us to learn more strategically from partnership successes and failures. Linkages and mainstreaming can be improved by working through dedicated technical assistance bodies and existing social partner structures, as well as through better use of monitoring and evaluation findings.	*Austria*: A 'TEP mainstreaming process' has been established at national level in order to better integrate partnerships into specific policy frames. The TEP Co-ordination Unit, Kooo, also encourages exchange of know-how between various TEP-levels and the national level. In 2004, Kooo, together with TEPs, developed the "STEPS" national consolidation process which focussed on co-operative learning by analysing TEP governance systems. *Germany*: The multi-layered partnership model encompasses an array of complex strands and provides an excellent framework for generating focussed and appropriate solutions to ongoing German labour market challenges. Vertical mainstreaming is facilitated by organisations such as trade unions, employer organisations and chambers which have national central offices/structures and regional/local branch offices. A "geographical mainstreaming" that builds upon different phases of partnership development has also been helpful. *Ireland*: "Cascade" connections are promoted between different national, regional and local levels. *Sweden:* Monitoring and evaluation are understood at Structural Fund Partnership (SFP) level as facilitating further mainstreaming by creating the basis for learning, one of the four principles upon which the Swedish ESF programme is founded (Learning, Innovation, Collaboration and Strategic Mainstreaming).

Table 7: Issues/Challenges and Solutions/examples

2.3 Common approaches to key themes

The COP sought to analyse how partnership approaches in Member States have supported themes identified as central to Europe's growth and development: governance, sustainability, transnationality and innovation. As well as identifying good partnership practices in these areas in Member States, and in accordance with the Commission's endorsement of "policy exchange and mutual learning" through the sharing of information and good practice between Member States, the COP also promoted these interconnected concepts in its ongoing activities.[2]

2.3.1 Governance

Good governance is central to the ESF and encouraged in the design and implementation of national, regional and local level approaches and institutional arrangements in Member States. The premise behind good governance is that institutions and actors from all sectors should work to ensure that the process of making and implementing decisions is conducted in a manner which is fair and inclusive. Working in partnership is central to the promotion of good governance because the mobilisation of different stakeholders to work together can provide both a more democratic policy 'mandate' and more responsive policy approaches to problem-solving.

The three areas highlighted in EC regulations as central for effective project governance include:
- Stakeholder engagement in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of ESF support
- Strengthening the capacity of social partners
- Partnerships, pacts and networking

MAs can ensure the promotion of good governance at programme level by developing partnership approaches that incorporate:[3]

- **Accountability:** Clear standards so that institutions and individuals are answerable to those who will be affected by their decisions or actions.
- **Coherence:** Consistent decisions, practices and processes that are logically integrated into wider frameworks.
- **Consensus-oriented:** Careful mediation of different stakeholder interests so that broad consensus is reached in the interests of society as a whole.
- **Effectiveness:** Production of results that meet societal needs while making the best use of available resources.

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[2] *Review of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy - Presidency Report,* EC 16818/09, 2009 p.17
http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/09/st16/st16818.en09.pdf
[3] Commission of the European Communities, *European Governance, A White Paper,* Brussels, *25.7.2001, COM (2001) 428 Final* and *What is Good Governance?* UNESCAP http://www.unescap.org/pdd/prs/ProjectActivities/Ongoing/gg/governance.asp

- **Impartially:** Frameworks which abide by the rule of law and enforce impartially for all stakeholders while protecting the rights of the most vulnerable.
- **Openness:** Transparency around the way that decisions are made and enforced, with clear and freely accessible information available to those who will be affected by them.
- **Participation:** Inclusive channels for appropriate stakeholder engagement which are offered in an organised manner via direct access to decision-making bodies or through legitimate intermediary institutions/representatives.
- **Responsiveness:** Serving all stakeholders within a reasonable timeframe and publicly demonstrating what particular decisions/actions have been taken to do this.

*In **Hungary** comments on 14 OPs were received on the webpage of the National Development Agency (NDA, ESF Managing Authority) from 1350 organisations and the OPs were revised in line with the feedback received. 65 OP Action Plans/2-year programming documents were also discussed via public consultation. While OPs were being negotiated with the National Development Agency, 1777 organisations took the opportunity to comment upon the documentation. As well as maintaining a database of registered partners, a working group of 15 NGOs acts as a constructive and critical "watchdog" and half of the membership of Monitoring Committees must, by law, be composed of NGO representatives.*

*In order to create a focussed regional and political approach to labour market issues in **Sweden**, feedback alluding to lack of governance in the previous Structural Fund period (2000-6) was analysed. The resulting programme aims to streamline national level organisation with regional administration and decision-making. Legal requirements stipulate that Structural Fund Partnership (SFP) membership must include a minimum of 50% municipal and regional politicians, as well as representatives from labour market organisations, the Swedish Employment Service, social partners, NGOs, universities, private sector and public authorities such as county councils, administrative and labour boards. SFPs for the sparsely inhabited northern parts of Sweden also include representatives from the Sami Parliament.*

*In **Ireland** participation of social partners in the governance of the OP is promoted through the composition of the Monitoring Committee which is reflective of Ireland's National Social Partnership structure. This established and accepted model of governance and participation is one familiar to all social partners who understand how to participate in such a structure in a meaningful and constructive manner.*

2.3.2 Sustainability

In the EU the term "sustainability" is mostly used in relation to sustainable development which is a regulatory requirement across EU Structural Funds. Sustainable development focuses on ensuring that actions achieve a continuous long-term improvement of quality of life that incorporates social inclusion and improved labour market polices.[4] Partnerships play a vital role in supporting sustainability through the promotion of stakeholder engagement and joint solutions to development challenges across different levels of society. In order to ensure that working in partnership promotes long-term, durable and positive change, evaluation and mainstreaming processes need to be carried out systematically. Such processes should demonstrate the added benefit of working in partnerships and ensure dissemination of

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[4] http://ec.europa.eu/environment/eussd/ and *Review of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy - Presidency Report,* EC 16818/09, 2009 http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/09/st16/st16818.en09.pdf

appropriate information on partnership lessons in order to inform policy level changes that ensure appropriate future strategies.

In **Austria** identified partnership strengths include better resource use and sustainable regional development. The policy framework for TEPs ensures that the partnerships autonomously agree on the content of their work and reflect their specific regional backgrounds. TEPs have also benefited from stable funding structures via the ESF which has enabled the OPs to better address and solve problems at policy interfaces e.g. between social policy and labour market policy.

2.3.3 Transnationality

Transnational linkages and interregional cooperation between Member States offer important avenues for accessing new ideas, innovative approaches and new skills. While it can be a challenge to build transnational connections because of differences in the particular contexts of Member States, the value of learning from how things are done elsewhere can lead to adaptations of existing partnership models, and the development of new ones. Such connections can also help to understand what works and what does not, and why. Additionally, connections and relationships across different countries, regions, sectors and organisations reinforce social capital and the achievement of:

- More effective integration and better understanding of legal contexts
- The creation of a "European" way of thinking
- Development of formal and informal cooperation networks
- Promotion of innovative activities
- Transferring of project results into policies and practice

Hungary has followed the Austrian EC best practice model and established Territorial Employment Pacts (TEPs) with the objective of fostering employment. Designed to create stable financial management through the development of programmes with the Ministry for National Economy, most of the TEPs cover micro-regions although some also operate at regional, county and local level. In line with other European countries where TEPs are used, it is envisaged that strong and long-lasting partnership projects and programmes will emerge.

In **Ireland** investigation is taking place on opportunities to involve NGOs and social partners in programme delivery under the OP through transnational and interregional co-operation proposals.

2.3.4 Innovation

Partnerships in the ESF are a key vehicle for innovation as they encourage different actors to share diverse perspectives, ideas and resources for influencing social cohesion and creating employment opportunities. In order to promote innovation MAs need to ensure that "space" is provided to encourage the development of new ways of doing things. This can be done by assessing and addressing potential external and internal obstacles to innovation, and supporting an environment where creative approaches are encouraged and rewarded.

In order to enhance innovation, **Austrian** TEPs were invited by the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection to present innovative project ideas for funding under priorities 1 and 2 of the Austrian OP Employment 2007-2013. Prior to this process, the TEPs jointly defined innovation criteria and developed a 'TEP Innovation Map' outlining innovative measures implemented within the categories of: process innovation, method innovation, structural innovation and systemic innovation. In 2011, an ESF Innovation Award was launched by the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection in order to raise awareness of the need for finding innovative ways to solve problems. The nominations for the 2011 award were all TEP projects.

In **Portugal** the Human Potential Operational Programme (POPH) has drawn on lessons from the EQUAL programme and created a positive enabling environment within the Managing Authority. An open and accessible leadership style and informal connections outside the workplace appear to have assisted this process. The result is a strong staff commitment to the work of the POPH and its aims of achieving national change.

In **Sweden** a Preparatory Committee at regional level has been established to support Structural Fund Partnerships (SFPs) while cooperation projects are required to fulfil at least one of the following programme criteria: innovation, strategic mainstreaming, cooperation and lifelong learning.

Lessons for ESF Managing Authorities

Mainstreaming efforts that reinforce social dialogue and cross-sector connections are vital for promoting confidence and innovation in partnership approaches.

The skills and knowledge of partnership "brokers" or intermediary organisations should be drawn upon proactively.

Positive and negative partnership lessons should be shared – even apparent failures or mistakes are useful for improving partnership implementation.

3. Overview of existing practices

Through PEOs, COP members used the Key Success Factor Framework (KSFF) to explore how ESF Managing Authorities and Intermediate Bodies were reinforcing partnership in different Member States. The PEO process allowed participants to identify good practice examples from the Member States being visited, as well as reflect on the relevance of lessons learnt for their own country/region.

3.1 Good practice examples

Good practice examples identified during PEO explorations at each stage of the Programme Cycle are highlighted below.

Key Success Factor	Good Practice Examples
Operational Programme Analysis and Design	
Contextual analysis Conducting careful studies of particular country contexts with identification of key target groups for programmes, and clarification of their needs, in order to identify major policy areas where partnership solutions can yield added value.	*Austria:* A contextual analysis has been important in developing and co-funding projects at regional, sub-regional and local levels in order to link policy areas and bring those on the margins of the labour market into the mainstream. The background work for the promotion of a focus (Priority 3b) to bring marginalised groups into the labour market was based upon findings showing that institutional cooperation, and the testing and development of innovative measures needed deepening. *Germany*: A clear and detailed analysis of the country's particular employment needs and recognition of the country's enormous complexities was carried out in order to adapt the partnership principle to the changing German reality e.g. East/West, regional/inter-regional, urban/rural, gender and age divisions etc. As a result a dynamic national/regional approach with a central focus on enhancing employability works actively to reduce disparities at a variety of different levels. *Greece*: A focus on "local partnerships for local development" aims to address the particular employment and social exclusion challenges faced in Greece. The need to overcome bureaucratic rigidity in the context of the current crisis with adjustments that promote organisational flexibility and networking has prompted an emphasis on strong local, regional and national connections and the involvement of target groups. *Ireland:* Themes such as innovation, restructuring, sustainable development and lifelong learning cross-cut a focus on developing the employability and skills of key target groups. Adjustments have also been made as a result of the national economic crisis and the need for budget reductions and pressure on state services. *Portugal:* Preparation of the Human Potential Operational Programme (POPH) involved a review of Portugal's country context which led to a cross-cutting focus on employment and social inclusion with particular emphasis on

	vocational training and skills-building. POPH has also built on the lessons learnt from previous partnership activities in addressing social challenges e.g. Social Network Partnerships. **Sweden:** *In order to create a focussed regional and political approach to labour market issues, feedback from previous experience that alluded to lack of governance was taken on board and led to acknowledgement of the need to balance power between national and regional political levels.*
Promoting an enabling environment Finding ways to reduce barriers to partnership implementation outside ESF Operational Programmes by: - pressing for positive government policies and supportive legal and administrative frameworks, - addressing regulatory issues such as tendering requirements, - promoting good cross-sectoral relations and a culture of cooperation, - working with intermediary organisations capable of bringing different institutions together, and, - providing opportunities for increasing partnership skills and expertise.	**Austria:** *The TEP model has assisted the involvement of actors in labour market, employment and social policy, and successfully linked these policy areas at regional, sub-regional and local levels. The model is also closely integrated into the National Reform Programme for Growth and Jobs in line with European Employment Strategy.* **Germany:** *Clear efforts have been made to reduce barriers to partnership implementation outside ESF OPs, particularly in the promotion of good cross-sectoral relations and a culture of cooperation.* **Greece:** *The strong culture of networking and co-responsibility developed through the EQUAL legal framework and mainstreaming process is being drawn upon in current practice.* **Ireland:** *A long history of working in partnership has reinforced a robust enabling environment that supports the work of the Human Capital Investment Operational Programme (HCI-OP). The role played by Pobal as a broker/intermediary able to bring different institutions together and provide opportunities for increasing partnership skills and expertise is also noteworthy.* **Portugal:** *An open and accessible OP leadership style and the promotion of informal connections outside the workplace appear to have assisted staff commitment to the work of the Human Potential Operational Programme (POPH) and its aims of achieving national change. Ensuring that the concept of partnership is fully understood and endorsed by programme managers, and that senior staff is supportive of working in this way, has reinforced programme consistency and a positive partnership enabling environment.* **Sweden**: *The partnership model has made careful use of Sweden's long history of social dialogue and good cross-sectoral relations, and sought to further reinforce this culture of cooperation through the new regional model.*

Identification of synergies Making connections to key existing national/regional/local programmes, structures and strategies related to programme focus areas.	*Austria:* TEPs promote synergies between policy areas as well as between national and regional programmes such as the ESF OP and regional ERDF OPs. In addition, careful analysis of synergies also takes places among different groups and levels within the TEPs themselves. *Germany:* Good synergies are promoted in the management of programmes between the ESF and the ERDF, across federal ministries, between federal and regional levels, and the local level. This has reinforced a complementary approach that focuses on multi-level needs. *Greece*: A National Thematic Network focusing on the integration of partnership in the design and implementation of all three ESF Operational Programmes in Greece is being established. *Hungary:* In the most disadvantaged micro-regions, synergies have clearly been identified among different organisations in order to promote local development strategies using both ESF and ERDF resources, as well as thematically e.g. by linking employment issues with health care in the Social Renewal Operational Programme (SROP). At transnational level too, the Austrian model of Territorial Employment Pacts (TEPs) has been drawn upon. *Ireland*: The cascade system adopted by the Irish ESF Managing Authority makes connections between national, regional and local levels using government structures as Intermediate Bodies and ensuring strong links with project beneficiaries at the local level. It is also clear that partnership in the ESF framework is part of a wider range of cross-sector connections in Ireland. *Sweden:* Strong synergies have been developed between the ESF and the ERDF, as well as with other programmes, to reinforce a complementary approach that focuses on regional needs.
Stakeholder engagement in the analysis and design process Clearly identifying stakeholders and encouraging them to participate in the analysis, design and writing of the Operational Programme document.	*Germany:* Five ministries, including the ESF-leading Federal Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs, have been involved in setting up the federal OP. Social partners have also contributed to the federal OP programme and the National Strategic Plan. In other programmes, social partners and voluntary welfare organisations are involved in designing and reaching agreement on the OP's strategic approach. *Hungary:* Considerable effort has gone into the encouragement of timely stakeholder participation in OP analysis and design. Organisations such as trade unions, employee interest groups and NGOs, representatives of business, education and science, were invited to comment on the direction of OPs, and workshops discussed draft versions of programme documents with relevant professionals, social partners and ministerial representatives. Programme documents are open for public debate via the internet for at least two weeks before final approval. Registered can give opinions as individuals or as organisational representatives. All feedback is answered by the Managing Authority, in many cases in cooperation with line Ministries.

	Operational Programme Delivery Planning
Integrating stakeholders into programme procedures Integrating relevant stakeholders into programme monitoring and decision-making procedures.	*Austria: Partnership projects are provided with proactive support, advice, information and exchange opportunities through the Co-ordination Unit of Austrian Territorial Employment Pacts (TEPs) or "Kooo".* *Germany: Stakeholders are actively involved in programme monitoring and decision-making procedures at horizontal level. Although they are not involved in technical administration, social partners and voluntary organisations participate in agreement on the wording of operations and procedures; the consultancy structures for applicants, and the establishment of Steering Committees for project selection, working rules, decision-making procedures and monitoring etc.* *Hungary: The systematic involvement of relevant stakeholders is strongly promoted in programme monitoring and decision-making procedures e.g. through the 50% NGO representation in Monitoring Committees, the involvement of NGO representatives in Project Selection Committees, the database of registered partners, and the use of an NGO watchdog committee.* *Sweden: Structural Fund Partnerships (SFPs) are established by a law that stipulates their composition and tasks. Municipal and regional politicians must form more than 50% of SFP membership. The chairperson is appointed by government and designates remaining members of the SFP in accordance with the principles laid down by government. Social partners, NGOs, universities and public authorities such as county councils, administrative and labour boards, are officially recognised members of the SFPs.*
Setting up mechanisms and guidelines for stakeholder involvement Putting procedures and guidelines in place for stakeholder involvement in project planning and implementation processes, and ensuring that adequate time is dedicated to establishing partnership before delivery.	*Hungary: In line with the analysis and design process, extensive stakeholder involvement is encouraged in project planning with time given for the receipt of comments on Action Plans.*
Developing partnership support structures Using dedicated partnership support structures alongside the programme to provide assistance, resources and advice on partnership coordination, management	*Germany: Dedicated partnership support structures alongside ESF programmes have been developed to provide assistance, resources and advice on partnership coordination, management and development, e.g. Programmes of the Federal Ministry for Senior Citizens, Women and Youth implemented the pilot programme Local Social Capital (LOS, 2003-8) and Local Empowerment programme (SvO, ongoing).* *Ireland: In its role as a partnership intermediary or broker, Pobal works*

	and development.	constantly to encourage a partnership approach through community engagement and connections among government departments, social partners and other stakeholders. Pobal also works alongside the Human Capital Investment Operational Programme (HCI-OP) to provide assistance, resources and advice on partnership coordination, management and development.

Calls For and Appraisal Of Proposals		
Supporting incorporation of partnership in project proposals Providing clear advice and information to project promoters on how to incorporate working in partnership into a proposal.	*Austria*: *Project applications for Priority 3b are only eligible if delivered and implemented by Austrian TEPs. At the same time Kooo supports the development and implementation of projects via specific activities such as jointly developed quality criteria (by the TEPs and the ESF Managing Authority in preparation for the call), the "3b Learning cycle" process during implementation, and ongoing individual partnership advice.*	
Assessing partnership rationale and implementation mechanisms Rigorously assessing the rationale for setting up a partnership and the appropriateness of the proposed implementation mechanism in project proposals so that the partnership is likely to add value and be executed well.	*Hungary:* *In Hungary, the rationale for setting up a partnership and the appropriateness of the proposed implementation mechanism must be made clear in project proposals. Applicants give details of tasks and responsibilities as well as a budget breakdown. In the project plan all forms of cooperation should be presented, including working groups, common internet sites and managerial meetings on project implementation. Based on this information, assessors and decision-making committees have the opportunity to examine the added value of partnership to a given project.* *Ireland:* *Pobal undertakes a rigorous assessment of strategic plans, particularly the capacity of a local partnership to effectively implement these. The emphasis is on good quality with quick turnaround and the incorporation of a review system into the appraisal process.*	
Drawing upon the expertise of stakeholders in assessing proposals Ensuring that relevant stakeholder expertise is integrated into drawing up calls for, and appraising proposals, while guarding against conflicts of interest.	*Germany:* *The involvement of relevant stakeholder expertise is clearly shown horizontally in the Weiter bilden and Rückenwind guidelines, as well as vertically in the LOS and SvO programmes where local network representatives are involved in the selection process for micro-projects.* *Greece*: *In order to ensure that stakeholders are involved in decisions about the focus of calls for proposals, social dialogue platforms are consulted.* *Hungary:* *Members of NGOs take part in Project Selection Committees as full members with voting rights.*	

Animation During Implementation		
Providing ongoing support Giving continuous proactive support on working in partnership to projects throughout the different phases of their project cycle.	*Austria:* *The nationwide TEP Co-ordination Unit (Kooo) supports projects carried out by TEPs. Joint activities are set up by Kooo together with TEPs, thereby providing a framework for multilateral advice between partnerships, as well as between TEPs and actors at national level.* *Greece: A practical guide for MAs, Intermediate Bodies and beneficiaries has*	

been prepared to assist partnership implementation.

Ireland: *Pobal provides partnerships with ongoing developmental and technical assistance as well as guidance on organisational management and governance, and specialist training around specific issues.*

Sweden: *Following the selection of projects by SFPs, support for implementation is provided by a range of different bodies and networks that complement the work of the ESF e.g. organisations working to promote gender mainstreaming and accessibility, national support institutions and thematic groups installed by the ESF Swedish Council in the fields of youth, integration, workplace learning, entrepreneurship and equality. These support processes continue from the project preparation phase until after the end of the project, and include processing assistance for enabling learning and gaining strategic impact.*

Opportunities for capacity-building Building the capacity of stakeholders to actively participate in programme governance.	**Germany:** *The Rückenwind guidelines have used the ESF principle of promoting partnership at governance level to enhance the capacity of the social welfare and non-profit sector, while also engaging them in programme design and development.*

Monitoring and Evaluation	
Reporting on status of partnership Paying attention to the status of the partnership so that problems are identified in time and resolved satisfactorily.	**Germany:** *Individual partnership project tracking is conducted though a central database in which status reports are provided on a monthly basis with target/achievement correlations, financial information and results. The database was broadly discussed with all relevant stakeholders and includes security measures for personal data protection.* **Sweden:** *An ongoing evaluation system has been adopted for both SFPs and cooperation projects from the start of their work and has enabled the identification of problems and challenges, as well as assisted in finding ways of addressing them as they arise.*
Participatory evaluation Ensuring that there is clear stakeholder participation in evaluation of partnership interventions at both programme and project level.	**Austria:** *The TEP evaluation concluded in 2005 was designed in a highly participatory way in order to enhance learning for the TEPs at both programme and project level. Workshops were conducted to support all involved in jointly defining what to take with them in order to improve the system as a whole. Furthermore, sustainability is reinforced through policy linkages and geographical connections which undergo ongoing monitoring and evaluation.*
Feeding back systematically into practice Promoting and encouraging ongoing learning from partnership successes and failures at both programme	**Austria:** *The TEP Network ensures ongoing exchange between TEPs through a variety of different formats and a method for learning from failures through a "TEP Open Reflection Cycle" which seeks to develop and build trust between actors.* **Sweden:** *The Swedish ESF Council has initiated and supported research*

and project level and ensure that lessons from these are shared.	and development work on partnerships and cooperation e.g. through one of the National Thematic Groups in the Equal programme, the NTG Partnership.

Table 8: Good practice examples

3.2 Lessons for visiting MAs and Intermediate Bodies

Key lessons for visiting COP members were captured at the end of each PEO exploration. The aim of this exercise was to ensure that visiting Managing Authority and Intermediate Body representatives identified areas that were most interesting and relevant to their work. Their reflections on how improvements might be made to the implementation of the partnership principle in their ESF OPs are provided below.

PEO (In chronological order)	Key lessons for visiting MAs
Portugal	*Austria:* The emphasis on individual non-financial incentives and pathways to education was recognised as important to consider when establishing learning platforms in Austria. *Germany*: The concrete definition of partnership used across the Human Potential Operational Programme (POPH) was seen as a way of enhancing better understanding of partnerships and could ease the application process (eligibility criteria) in Germany.
Sweden	*Estonia*: The strong regionalisation and influence of SFPs could be explored as a model in Estonia. *Germany*: The central/regional interplay was regarded as inspirational and possibilities for bringing social partners together through such connections could be reviewed in relation to the German context.
Germany	*Austria:* The rules of procedure and selection criteria for multi-stakeholder programme Steering Committees were seen as interesting governance models which could support more effective decision-making processes in Territorial Employment Pacts in Austria. *Hungary:* The independence of financial bodies and how to separate monitoring, content, information and financing issues could be reviewed in relation to Hungary's ESF programme.
Greece	*Belgium/Flanders:* The emphasis on strong local-level empowerment and the flexible interpretation and development of partnership approaches was useful to reflect upon. *Germany*: The empowerment of women in the Greek rural areas, especially their role in strengthening the social economy, was extremely motivating and could be reviewed in relation to the German context.
Ireland	*Portugal:* Local Development Companies (LDCs) generated the idea of a universal partnership application which could be developed for ESF funding in parallel with other funding streams. *Sweden:* This model stimulated reflection on Structural Fund Partnerships and the possibility of working more closely with the ESF MA on identifying needs to be addressed by specific calls for proposals with support for project promoters at regional level, rather than focussing only on prioritising "approved" projects.
Hungary	*Germany*: The National Development Agency (NDA) and local representational levels served

	as examples of where agreements might be developed in Germany between regional and local levels. **Ireland**: The transparency of the consultation process and the democratic procedure given to ESF spending provided examples of openings for greater public involvement in ESF programmes in Ireland. **Europe-wide**: The Hungarian experience offered important lessons for a more integrated approach to social development for the LEADER programme focussing on rural development.
Austria	**Portugal:** The political mainstreaming of ESF objectives was viewed as being in line with the EC's Open Method of Coordination (OMC) designed to support mutual learning and encourage cooperation through exchange of knowledge and experience. **Romania**: The involvement of public employment services could be looked at in the Romanian context where they are not a major player in partnerships. Links between monitoring and evaluation systems and the promotion of sustainability offered broad measures for partnership support which Romania could learn much from. **Sweden:** The TEP model was an extremely useful one for Sweden to think about in the next programming period, particularly in its promotion of a strong territorial dimension.

Table 9: Key lessons for visiting MAs

Lessons for ESF Managing Authorities

Careful preparatory work is crucial to the development of solid partnership implementation.

Opportunities for reinforcing stakeholder engagement should be assessed during all phases of OP development.

Different partnership levels and connections should be endorsed on a continuous basis.

Monitoring and evaluation processes that assess both impact and relationship-building are important to build in at the beginning of an OP's work.

4. Partnership checklist for ESF Managing Authorities

- 35 questions to support the development of an adequate partnership framework-

The checklist below is drawn from the Key Success Factor Framework (KSFF). It is designed as a simple guidance tool **to assist representatives of Managing Authorities and Intermediate Bodies** to support the development of partnership implementation at both governance and project levels throughout the Operational Programme cycle.

1. OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME ANALYSIS AND DESIGN	
1. Do you conduct a study of your particular country context before developing ESF Operational Programmes (OP)?	√
2. Do you consider the following: - the country's historical, social, economic and political situation? - the needs of different regions and target groups? - government policies and legal/regulatory frameworks that may impact programmes? - previous partnership activities in addressing social challenges? - existence of intermediary organisations able to work across different sectors? - availability of skilled individuals capable of working with different stakeholders?	√
3. Do you have strategies in place for reducing barriers to partnership outside ESF OPs such as the promotion of: - positive government policies? - supportive legal and administrative frameworks that address regulatory issues such as tendering requirements? - good cross-sectoral relations and a culture of cooperation? - connections with intermediary organisations capable of bringing different institutions together? - opportunities for increasing partnership skills and expertise?	√
4. Do you incorporate the most relevant economic and labour market policy analyses into your OPs?	√
5. Do your ESF OPs have connections to existing national/regional/local programmes, structures and strategies?	√
6. Do you examine other fund connections when developing your ESF OPs (e.g. ESF relationships with Structural Funds, ERDF and others)?	√
7. Do your OPs clearly provide information about the partnership approach (including the purpose and goals of partnerships) adopted in relation to ESF regulation?	√
8. Do your OPs and implemented projects have clearly established guidelines and standards?	√
9. Do you build the capacity of stakeholders in order to encourage broad-based participation in: - identifying the needs and concerns of different stakeholders? - understanding the incentives for different partners and stakeholders to work	√

together?	
- the analysis, design and writing of your OP?	
- national, regional and local level information-sharing about partnership requirements in order to achieve objectives?	
10. Does your OP openly share information on different aspects of partnerships e.g. decision-making, finances and monitoring and evaluation?	√
11. Is transnationality considered in the partnership approach of your OP?	√

2. OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME DELIVERY PLANNING

12. Do you consider whether partnership is the best approach for delivery and/or assess whether alternative solutions developed by individual parties may be more appropriate?	√
13. Do you encourage ongoing stakeholder input and feedback on OP procedures and partnership projects during planning, development and monitoring in an open and timely manner?	√
14. Do you have publicly accessible guidelines for stakeholders with advice on rules and procedures for working in partnership? (e.g. for planning, finances, decision-making, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation?)	√
15. Do you use dedicated partnership support structures in order to assist the development of partnership at both governance and project levels?	√
16. Do you draw upon the experiences and knowledge of intermediary organisations to support partnership promotion?	√
17. Do you ensure that partnership managers at programme and project level have the necessary skills for working with different stakeholders?	√

3. CALLS FOR AND APPRAISAL OF PROPOSALS

18. Do you ensure the integration of relevant stakeholder expertise when drawing up calls for proposals?	√
19. Do you ensure that partnership guidance is clear and accessible in application forms, planning documents, etc.?	√
20. Do you provide information or training to project promoters on how to incorporate a partnership approach into a proposal?	√
21. Do you assess the rationale for setting up a partnership at project level? Do you consider whether partnership is the most appropriate vehicle for particular projects?	√
22. Do you check carefully on how a partnership project will be managed and delivered?	√
23. Do you ensure that roles and responsibilities within partnerships at project level are clearly established and understood by all partners?	√
24. Do you check whether members of partnership management/ Steering Groups have sufficient authority to commit their organisations to decisions?	√
25. Do you ensure fair and robust review procedures for the evaluation of appraisals which guard against conflicts of interest?	√

4. ANIMATION DURING IMPLEMENTATION

26. Do you provide continuous proactive support to partnership projects (e.g. via contact	√

persons at Ministry level, meetings, online platforms, newsletters on recent developments etc.) during the following stages : - Preparatory work and initiation - Ongoing development - Mainstreaming and further action - Evaluation?	
27. Do you provide opportunities for the development of partnership at both programme and project level skills (e.g. through meetings supported/coached by the MA) in order to enhance exchange between: - partnerships dealing with similar issues? - both successful and problematic partnerships?	√
28. Do you encourage communication between partnership projects with mutual opportunities for sharing experience and support (e.g. through meetings, partnership conferences, online platforms, etc)?	√
29. Do you use technical assistance in order to enhance the ability of stakeholders to take part in programmes and projects (e.g. to support partnership co-ordination)?	√
5. MONITORING AND EVALUATION	
30. Do you track both the work of the OP and partnerships at project level systematically? Does your monitoring system: - Ensure that targets are met - Identify problems in good time - Assist in satisfactory resolution of problems?	√
31. Do you ensure stakeholder participation in the evaluation of partnership interventions at both programme and project level?	√
32. Does your evaluation include what the added value of the partnership has been for stakeholders and target groups?	
33. Do you encourage options for ongoing learning at programme and project level from both partnership successes and failures?	√
34. Do you foster the development and maintenance of learning networks between individuals and organisations where partnership knowledge and practices can be shared?	√
35. Do you ensure that key partnership lessons are shared and broadly disseminated?	√

Table 10: Checklist for ESF Managing Authorities

5. Communiqué on Partnerships in the ESF (Partnership Communiqué)

The Partnership Communiqué is a joint statement from ESF Managing Authorities on partnerships. The Communiqué stresses the importance of working in partnerships throughout both project and programme phases, as well as at all levels of implementation, from the national to the local level.

Preamble

The Community of Practice on Partnership in the ESF (COP network)[5]:

Recognising that:

- The EU 2020 Strategy[6] calls on all parties and stakeholders to help implement the strategy, working in partnership, by taking action in areas within their responsibility;

- Partnerships are referred to in the European Social Fund (ESF) Regulation as a governance mechanism (ESF Reg., Art. 5) as well as territorial alliances (ESF Reg., Art. 3) in order to mobilise for reforms in the field of employment and labour market inclusiveness[7]; and,

- Partnerships foster employment, social cohesion, economic development, environmental sustainability and quality of life within EU 27 as well as in many OECD LEED countries[8];

Proclaims this Partnership Communiqué [9] as a recommendation to the European Commission, to the end that partnerships should be integrated into both policy and design at all levels of governance in ESF programmes.

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[5] The COP network was set up as a mutual transnational learning network in order to: ensure knowledge exchange between ESF Managing Authorities and Intermediary Bodies with a focus on partnerships being adopted by national and regional Operational Programmes (OPs) of EU Member States, and to stimulate more creative partnership thinking and implementation in particular the ESF, in order to enhance policy outcomes of OPs. It contributes to better performance of the EU with impact on employment and social inclusion via enhancing the employment situation, supporting social inclusion of target groups and strengthening the economic development of the regions by providing high quality support to partnerships in the Structural Fund context.
[6] See Fifth Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion available at
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/reports/cohesion5/pdf/5cr_en.pdf
[7] See http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/regulation/pdf/2007/fse/ce_1081%282006%29_en.pdf
[8] See http://www.oecd.org/document/22/0,3746,en_2649_34417_20743766_1_1_1_1,00.html
[9] The Communiqué was developed by the COP network and presented at the International Partnership Conference on 12 October 2011 in Vienna. The COP network comprises the following 12 core members: Austria: Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection and ZSI – Centre for Social Innovation; Belgium/Flanders: ESF-Agency Flanders; Germany: Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and gsub - Projektegesellschaft mbH; Greece: Ministry of Employment and Social Protection; Hungary: National Development Agency and Ministry for National Economy; Ireland: Pobal; Poland: "Cooperation Fund" Foundation; Portugal: Programme Operacional Potencial Humano; Romania: Ministry of Labour, Social Solidarity and Family.

Recommendation 1

Partnerships are a valuable and essential policy instrument and practice and should be recognised as an integral part of both policy design and delivery at all governance levels.

The COP's results prove that a large number of EU Member States have built on their expertise of partnership implementation in either the form of contractual territorial alliances or of formal governance structures in the ESF policy design and implementation cycle (the partnership principle). Partnership is thus widely accepted as an invaluable instrument for stimulating more sustainable socio-economic development and the attainment of the EU's 2020 goals. The endorsement and practice of partnership across all governance levels and institutional structures, however, needs to be enhanced and made more visible in some Member states.

Recommendation 2

Partnerships should be used to foster social innovation, stimulate change and mobilise reforms.

Through the involvement, adequate consultation and participation of stakeholders, partnerships develop cross-cutting perspectives and integrated approaches to multi-dimensional problems. Partnerships adapt policies to territorial circumstances, needs and opportunities. The added value created by partnerships also involves the bringing together of diverse policy areas, the anchoring of new forms of collaboration, communication, participation and learning within EU regions, as well as the development and realisation of a common understanding of achievements. Partnerships therefore enable comprehensiveness and inclusiveness of strategies and policies. Since partnerships develop social innovations and encourage improvements in processes and actions within governance structures, they are a valuable vehicle for change.

Recommendation 3

Partnerships should contribute to the enhancement of policy outcomes from programmes, policies and actions.

Partnerships can add considerable value to policy development by improving dialogue and co-operation between partnership members, programme designers and policy makers at local, regional, national and international levels. Since they build consultative cross-policy strategies that are appropriate to territorial needs, policy outcomes implemented via partnerships have the potential to provide more sustainable solutions to development challenges than when different sectors operate in isolation.

Recommendation 4

Systematic learning from partnerships should be enhanced.

The EU needs to respond adequately to present and future challenges such as demographic change, recovery from the financial crisis, as well as the ongoing increase of poverty within the EU. Learning environments which are built across borders, administrative cultures and institutional barriers assist the possibility of finding joint responses. More dynamic and innovative cross-territorial learning exchanges and capacity building between stakeholders at all territorial and implementation levels, where experiences and knowledge are shared openly and reflected upon at the same eye-level, can make a valuable contribution to addressing the EU's social and economic challenges and meeting the goals set for Europe 2020[10].

Recommendation 5

Adequate resources should be provided for successful partnership implementation.

By fostering social innovation via partnerships sustainable solutions can be created. In order to contribute to the EU's improved policy performance more comprehensively and sustainably, partnership implementation requires resources such as knowledge, commitment, time and money. Thus, both financial and in-kind resources are needed to build partnerships and to develop the requisite enabling environment at all governance levels.

Recommendation 6

Comprehensive efforts should be made to improve policy planning and delivery via partnerships.

Partnership offers mechanisms for achieving comprehensiveness and inclusiveness of strategies and policies which are grounded in the common views and understanding of all involved. Thus, Member States and the EC need to work together to promote creative partnership thinking and implementation throughout the policy cycle. In line with the OMC (Open Method of Coordination)[11] policies designed and implemented are encouraged to adopt the partnership principle. In order to provide collective answers to challenges more comprehensive efforts need to be taken, including: 1) the improvement of vertical communication between policy makers at different governance levels; 2) the integration of civil society concerns into strategic planning exercises; 3) the enhanced use of synergies between different policies; and 4) recognition within the policy process of local diversity and the value of evidence from practice.[12]

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[10] See EU 2020 Strategy: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010: 2020:FIN:EN:PDF
[11] See Open Method of Coordination: http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=750
[12] See OECD LEED Vienna Action Statement on Partnerships 2010: http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/23/11/44598484.pdf

6. COP activities and evaluation

This section describes the work of the COP and its key outputs and outcomes to date. It also shares the main findings of the evaluation of the COP which was commissioned by the COP's lead partner, the Austrian Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection.

6.1 Key activities

The key activities of the COP were divided into two pillars: exchange and learning, and joint developments.

6.1.1 Exchange and learning

Partnership portal

The COP website contains information and details on partnership in the ESF, events involving the COP as well as links to key relevant sites on the ESF and other ESF learning networks. It includes:

- **A cybrary**: with key publications about partnership relating to both the ESF and wider partnership issues, including the reference guide *How ESF Managing Authorities and Intermediate Bodies Support Partnership*
- **Country information:** details of how all 27 EU Member States are implementing partnership in the ESF with relevant facts sheets, country links etc.
- **PEO explorations:** information on the process side of PEOs, including good practices and reinforcement of the KSFF, and reports on meetings and PEO explorations
- **Policy fora:** discussion platform on diverse areas/themes relating to partnership and COP business

COP meetings and PEO Explorations

COP meetings and PEO explorations were at the core of the work of the COP. In total, ten COP meetings were held between 2009 and 2011. Each meeting and PEO was structured around a specific theme:

Country and PEO date	COP meeting/PEO Theme
Austria *11 February, 2009*	*Kick-off meeting – establishing the ground for working together*
Portugal *18 – 19 June 2009*	*Portuguese partnerships implemented within the scope of the ESF*
Sweden *17 – 18 November 2009*	*Linking regional growth and labour market policies via partnerships*

Germany *25 – 26 March 2010*	*Partnership practices on enhancing employability in Germany*
Greece *17 – 18 June 2010*	*Partnership perspectives on strengthening local development*
Ireland *20 October 2010*	*The Irish experience of partnership working in the area of gender equality*
Belgium *19 January, 2011*	*COP Meeting to explore burning issues emerging in PEOs*
Hungary *6 – 7 June 2011*	*Strengthening local employment activities by promoting partnership*
Austria *10 October 2011*	*Linking policy fields by partnerships: the Austrian Territorial Employment Pacts*
Austria *6 December 2011*	*Final COP Meeting to review achievements and discuss future action*

Table 11: COP meetings and PEO explorations

International Partnership Conference

The COP conference *Partnerships: Opportunities and Challenges* took place from 11 – 12 October 2011 at Schönbrunn Palace Conference Centre in Vienna. Representatives from ESF Managing Authorities (MAs), programme designers, national and regional policy makers, partnership practitioners and experts came together to discuss different partnership practices adopted by MAs at programme and project level, as well as the challenges of partnership implementation. The conference programme combined panel presentations with interactive sessions on partnership practices adopted by ESF Operational Programmes (see Annex 2).

6.1.2 Joint developments

PEO key lessons reports

After each PEO exploration results were summarised by the facilitator and experts, discussed online by reviewers and the host Member State, and, finally, issued as a PEO Key Lessons Report. The reports comprise detailed information on partnership activities in the Member State, discussion of their effects and opportunities, recommendations for the host country, as well as lessons learnt by visiting COP members. The documents are between 6-12 pages in length and have the following structure:

- Foreword by the chairing Member State
- Member State partnership practices:
  - Short description of the partnership approach adopted by Member State for ESF or other programmes
  - Short presentation of the practices examined during the PEO exploration

        o Summary of the discussion on PEOs with other stakeholders (including effects and opportunities from the point of view of the host Member State)
- Summary of Key Lessons learnt by other COP members

All seven PEO Key Lessons Reports were issued within a month of the exploration and have provided the basis for the content of this Manual.

Communiqué on Partnerships in the ESF

The Partnership Communiqué was drawn up by COP members in order to provide a joint statement and set of recommendations on the importance of working in partnership in the ESF during all project and programme phases, as well as at different levels of implementation, from the national to the local level (see Chapter 5).

Partnership Learning Manual

The Partnership Learning Manual was designed to include the key outputs of the COP and the work of different Member States in implementing partnerships with practical tips and suggestions for supporting partnering.

6.2 Evaluation of the work of the COP

Between January and October 2011, the Tavistock Institute[13] conducted an evaluation of the work of the COP.[14] Commissioned by the lead partner, the Austrian Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, the evaluation team were tasked with assessing the impact and effectiveness of COP activities (including project management) in terms of its overall objectives, in particular "enhancing policy outcomes" (see Annex 3).

The evaluation showed that the learning network was highly effective and that the PEO explorations in particular supported learning and knowledge exchange on partnerships.

> "The COP has generated rich learning on good partnership practices in different contexts as well as a common definition; the key written outputs have, or will be, produced and internal as well as external networks have been established…the knowledge transfer process suggests that the ground for strengthened capacity to innovate and modernise has been created, through a better understanding of context, increased knowledge and knowledge transfer interventions in the form of dissemination of learning within members' organisations and to relevant external stakeholders."[15]

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[13] http://www.tavinstitute.org/
[14] The Tavistock Institute *External evaluation of Community of Practice on Partnership in the ESF*, A final report prepared for the Austrian Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection (BMASK), London, 2011
[15] Ibid. p35.

Specific successes were identified as:

- The critical friend review process;
- Understanding of differences among partnership approaches in Member States;
- Collection of good partnership practices;
- A common definition of partnership and its greater conceptualisation; and,
- PEO key lesson reports.

The evaluators felt that the COP had managed to promote effective mutual learning through:

- **A manageable group size** - with good geographical representation from across Europe which provided a wide range of cultures and working practices that enabled understanding of partnership working across different contexts.
- **A high level of trust (built on prior relationships)** - the fact that core members had worked together on the prior European Thematic Group on Partnerships under the EQUAL programme.
- **Contributing distinct expertise** - the mix of different types of members, and the way they interacted with each other (see figure below).
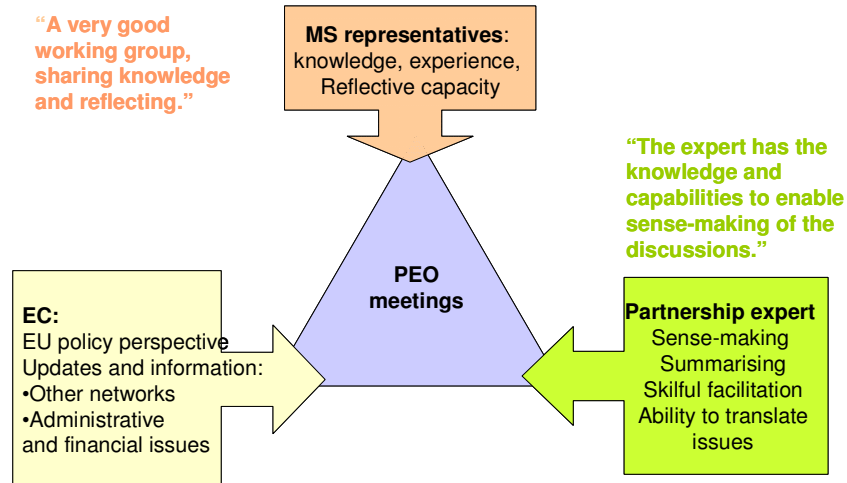

Figure 2: Contribution of each COP member to PEO meetings

Soft results (in which good practices were mainstreamed so that implementation of the partnership principle was improved and capacity to innovate strengthened), were identified as:

- **Knowledge transfer interventions for peer reviewed countries** due to the close collaboration and preparation generated among relevant actors in preparation for a PEO.
- **Interaction and dialogue around insights from peer review meetings** enabling the development of a common understanding of partnership, better comprehension of different levels of partnership, the application of theoretical distinctions in practical settings, and the interrelationship between different types of partnerships.
- **Networking between COP members**
- **Networking beyond the COP** with other ESF networks, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Local Economic and Employment Development Programme (OECD/LEED) and national organisations.

Hard results (or the application of knowledge gained in practice so that better policies, programmes and actions were developed in Member States through the integration and application of COP lessons), included:

- **Greater awareness and reflection** on partnership planning, implementation, appraisal and evaluation.
- **Some intentions to incorporate lessons into future projects** and OPs, including changing the way feedback is given to projects and ensuring the engagement of different tiers of government in communicating and designing ESF funded projects.

The evaluators concluded that although the COP had achieved some good results, a number of challenges minimised its ability to have the policy impact that was so central to its aims. The key challenges limiting policy impact were found to be:

- **Timing** - OPs are developed and signed off for the duration of the programming period by both the European Commission and the Member State/region. Fundamental approaches (including text on partnerships) can therefore not be changed.

- **Legislation and politics** - Linked to the above are organisational and legislative challenges to applying learning. In many MS the organisational culture does not lend itself to the fast adoption of innovations, and cultural and organisational differences are barriers to implementing much of the COP learning into the domestic context.

- **Opportunities to influence** - The upward transfer of learning from the COP to the policy hierarchy depends upon contact with appropriate decision makers in Ministries and MAs and greater flexibility in the regulation of Structural Funds. It was noted that policy influence was limited by :

  o *The nature of each COP member's role and their seniority*, especially as some COP members were not involved in ESF implementation
  o *Time pressures / priorities of the day to day job*, as well as not having roles allowing them to introduce changes to ESF delivery, some members only

focused on operational issues (trouble shooting, other administration) and have little time to work differently.

While the evaluation found no evidence to date that the work of the COP has impacted on policy outcomes in Member States in the current programming period, the attitudinal changes promoted were recognised as building blocks for the increased awareness necessary for future changes to project planning and design. Furthermore, endorsement of the PEO methodology points to its potential for adaptation in different policy settings as well as for other 'horizontal issues' such as innovation and sustainability. The approach can be used without difficulty in EU reflection processes, thus supporting interactions of expertise between Member States on an ongoing basis.[16]

Lessons for ESF Managing Authorities

Mainstreaming partnerships and impacting policy take time and require connections with the "right" people.

Steps towards policy impact can be positively promoted by mutual learning opportunities that:

Work with a core group of critical friends acting as both reviewers and reviewed,

Position exchanges as learning processes rather than evaluations, and

Obtain agreement to being "prepared" to integrate lessons learnt rather than being forced to adopt them.

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[16] Stott & Scoppetta, 2011

7. Useful references

Materials on the COP

Community of Practice on Partnerships in the ESF
http://partnership.esflive.eu

PEO Key Lessons Reports
http://partnership.esflive.eu/node/415

- Linking Policy Fields by Partnerships: The Austrian Territorial Employment Pacts (TEPs), 2011

- Strengthening Local Employment Activities by Promoting Partnership in Hungary, 2011

- The Irish Experience of Partnership, Working in the Area of Gender Equality, 2010

- Strengthening Local Development through Partnership in Greece, 2010

- Partnership Practices on Enhancing Employability in Germany, 2010

- Linking Regional Growth and Labour Market Policies via Partnerships in Sweden, 2010

- Portuguese Partnerships Implemented Within the Scope of the ESF, 2009

How ESF Managing Authorities and Intermediate Bodies Support Partnership, Brussels, 2008
http://partnership.esflive.eu/files/guidebook_spread_lowres.pdf (accessed 23/12/2011)

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http://transnational-journal.eu/3_1_2011/EJOTS_1_2011.pdf (accessed 23/12/2011)

The Tavistock Institute *External evaluation of Community of Practice on Partnership in the ESF*, A final report prepared for the Austrian Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection (BMASK), London, 2011

European Commission Publications

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http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/data/document/200606-reflection-note-partner_en.pdf (accessed 23/12/2011)

Regulation (EC) No 1081/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the European Social Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1784/1999, *Official Journal of the EU*, L 210, Volume 49**,** 31 July 2006
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:210:0012:0018:EN:PDF (accessed 23/12/2011)

Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 July 2006 on the European Social Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999, *Official Journal of the EU*, L 210, Volume 49, 31 July 2006
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2006/l_210/l_21020060731en00250078.pdf (accessed 23/12/2011)

Social partners as beneficiaries, European Social Fund support to social partners in the 2007-2013 period
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ANNEX I: Partnership approaches of COP member countries

Country	No of ESF OPs	ESF priorities	Partnership approach
Austria	*1 National OP - Employment Austria*	*Adaptability of workers and enterprises* *Fighting unemployment* *Social inclusion* *Lifelong learning* *Territorial Employment Pacts*	*Territorial Employment Pacts (TEPs) - contracted regional partnerships to better link employment policy with other policies to improve employment situation at regional and local level.*
Germany	*1 Multi-objective OP covering whole country* *17 Regional OPs*	*Adaptability of workers and enterprises* *Life-long learning / basic and vocational training for young people* *Access to labour market* *Technical assistance* *Transnationality*	*"T model" combining horizontal partnerships at federal level with vertical partnerships initiated at federal level but addressing regional and local levels*
Greece	*3 National OPs* *5 Regional OPs* *12 European Territorial Cooperation Programmes partially including employment initiatives.*	*Social dialogue* *Co-responsibility* *Equality* *Local-level development*	*Mainstreaming of EQUAL programme principles to promote greater empowerment and social cohesion, esp. at local level.*
Hungary	*2 National OPs* *- Social Renewal Operational Programme (SROP)* *- State Reform Operational Programme (SRefOP)*	*Raise employment rate and labour force participation* *Reduce regional employment disparities* *Enhance better opportunities for disadvantaged groups* *Modernise education and training system* *Improve performance of public administration*	*Emphasis on added value of partnership and stakeholder engagement, with special focus on local level.*
Ireland	*1 National OP - Human Capital Investment Operational Programme (HCI-OP)*	*Problem areas in economy* *Increase worker productivity by up-skilling them* *Increase employability of groups with low employment*	*Local partnership and community emphasis to reinforce grassroots links.*

		rates *Support Active Labour Market Programmes for the unemployed*	
Portugal	*1 National OP - Human Potential Operational Programme (POPH)* *2 Regional OPs* *1 Multi-objective Technical Assistance OP*	*10 priority axes: 1 and 2 being the most important:* *1.Initial Qualification* *2.Life-Long Adaptability and Learning* *3.Professional Management and Further Training* *4.Advanced Training* *5.Supporting Entrepreneurship and Transition into Active Life* *6.Citizenship, Inclusion and Social Development* *7.Gender Equality* *8.Algarve* *9. Lisbon* *10.Technical Assistance*	*Macro, meso and micro level approach with two forms of partnership at meso and micro level: Type A-'formal' projects developed in partnership with defined access to financing and management and Type B - 'informal' partnerships based on logic of coordinated work.*
Sweden	*1 National OP* *8 Regional plans*	*To link regional growth with labour market policies*	*Regional focus with emphasis on improved governance through engagement of politicians. Structural Fund Partnerships (SFPs) act as selection bodies for "cooperation projects" operating at multiple levels.*

Table 12: Partnership approaches of COP member countries

ANNEX 2: International Partnership Conference Agenda

International Partnership Conference, "Partnerships: Opportunities and challenges" Schönbrunn Palace Conference Centre (Tagungszentrum Schönbrunn), Vienna, Austria, 11 – 12 October 2011. More information available at http://partnership.esflive.eu/node/627

	Tuesday, 11 October 2011
13.00 – 13.30	Registration of participants and welcome coffee
13.30 – 14.00	**OPENING REMARKS** - Petra Draxl, Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, Austria - Ulrike Rebhandl, Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, Austria - Andrea Forti, Committee of the Regions
14.00 – 14.45	**INTERVIEW SESSION "Community of Practice on Partnership in the ESF"** The ESF learning network "Community of Practice on Partnership in the ESF" was introduced and key members interviewed. - Jana Machacova, Centre for Social Innovation, Austria - Doris Ballwein, Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, Austria - Reiner Aster, gsub-Projektegesellschaft mbH, Germany - Carlos Nunes, Human Potential Operational Programme, Portugal - Leda Stott, COP partnership expert
14.45 – 16.15	**PANEL SESSION "Impact of partnerships on Operational Programmes of the Member States/Regions and their future perspective (2014+)"** - Ulrike Rebhandl, Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, Austria - Paweł Chorąży, Department for ESF Management, Ministry of Regional Development, Poland - Martina Böhner, Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Germany - Andrea Forti, Committee of the Regions
16.15 – 16.30	**INTRODUCTION of interactive sessions** The design and organisation of interactive sessions was presented by the moderator of the conference. Up to 15 selected partnerships at programme and project level from the EU 27 were presented at exhibition stands, providing the possibility for participants to exchange knowledge in pre-arranged meetings.
16.30 – 17.00	**Networking coffee break**
17.30	**END OF DAY 1**
19.00	**DINNER RECEPTION**

Wednesday, 12 October 2011

9.00 – 9.30	Welcome coffee
9.30 – 10.15	**INTERACTIVE SESSION I** The session offered participants the opportunity to meet representatives of selected partnerships and exchange practical experiences at their exhibition stands. Each session, lasting 30 minutes, was followed by a 15 minute break.
10.15 – 10.45	**INTERACTIVE SESSION II** The same conference method was used as in Interactive Session I.
10.45 - 11.30	Coffee Break
11.30 - 13.30	**"Partnership Learning Manual and COP lessons learnt" followed by participant discussions** The Partnership Learning Manual aims to assist ESF Managing Authorities in their further development and help countries learn from existing experience. This interactive session looked at the Manual's contents and obtained feedback on the Partnership Checklist from participants. - Leda Stott, COP partnership expert
13.30 – 13.45	**RESULTS OF THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF THE COP** Analysis of the external evaluation was presented by the Tavistock Institute including the effects of the COP in respect to enhancing policies outcomes of its members, as well as the level of sustainability reached by implementing the COP tasks in order to assist Member states/regions to enhance policy outcomes. - Kerstin Junge, Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, United Kingdom
13.45 – 14.00	**COMMUNIQUÉ ON PARTNERSHIPS IN THE ESF** The Partnership Communiqué, which was developed by the COP core members, aims to promote partnership as an integral part of both policy design and delivery at all governance levels. The Communiqué consisting of the set of recommendations was presented by the COP lead partner (Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection – BMASK, Austria). - Petra Draxl/ Doris Ballwein, Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, Austria
14.00 – 15.00	**LUNCH and FAREWELL**

* The conference was moderated by Klaus Schuch (Centre for Social Innovation, ZSI)

ANNEX 3: Evaluation of the COP

Content of the evaluation

1. Adequate and proper instruments   *Are the COP network activities (webpage, meetings, etc) appropriate in order to attain the COP objectives?*
2. Structure of the partnership   *Is the partnership structured in a way to fulfil the tasks properly?*   *Are the roles of the COP members adequate, relevant and executed in a result-oriented manner?*   *Does the COP structure guarantee a high quality of partnership and exchange?*
3. Outcome and sustainability   *What are the effects of the COP in respect to enhancing policies outcomes of its members?*   *What level of sustainability is reached by implementing the tasks of the COP in the specific way in order to assist MS to enhance policy outcomes?*
4. Challenges   *COP evaluation will also have to take a deeper look at challenges like loss of commitment of members, minimising potential outcomes as achievements to reach national goals could come first, efforts to enable MS to adapt to sustainable change and the integration of lessons learnt by MS.*

Methodology

- Two rounds of semi-structured telephone interviews with 'core' members of the COP and one round of interviews with the partnership expert, monitoring expert and the representative from the European Commission.

- Observations of two PEO meetings (Brussels, January 2011; Budapest, June 2011);

- Review of documents produced by the COP, most notably the key lessons reports, feedback forms from the PEO meetings, the original 'project' proposal for the COP (the grant agreement), internal evaluation documents and key relevant meeting minutes.

Source: *The Tavistock Institute External evaluation of Community of Practice on Partnership in the ESF*, A final report prepared for the Austrian Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection (BMASK), London, 2011

ANNEX 4: COP contacts

Country	Organisation	Main Person
Austria	Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection (BMASK)	Doris Ballwein
Austria	Centre for Social Innovation (ZSI)	Jana Machačová
Belgium/Flanders	ESF Agency Flanders	Joeri Colson
Belgium	European Commission	Szilárd Tamás
Belgium	European Association for Information on Local Development (AEIDL)	Katalin Kolosy
Germany	Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS)	Martina Böhner
Germany	gsub - social business consulting mbH	Reiner Aster
Greece	Ministry of Employment and Social Security	Rania Oikonomou
Hungary	Ministry for National Economy	Judit Temesszentandrasi
Hungary	National Development Agency (NDA)	Csaba Kiss
Ireland	Pobal	Richard Deane
Poland	Cooperation Fund	Beata Puszczewicz
Portugal	Operational Programme Human Development (POPH)	Carlos Nunes
Romania	Ministry of Labour, Social Solidarity and Family	Adrian Popescu
Sweden	Swedish ESF Council	Karin Gellin

Table 13: COP contacts

Partnership Learning Manual

For more information on this publication and the Community of Practice (COP) on Partnership, please contact:

Doris Ballwein
Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection (BMASK)
Stubenring 1
1010 Vienna
Austria
Doris.Ballwein@bmask.gv.at

or

Jana Machačová
Centre for Social Innovation (ZSI)
Linke Wienziele 246
1150 Vienna
Austria
machacova@zsi.at

Information on the COP and its work may also be obtained from the contacts listed in Annex 4 and via the COP website: http://partnership.esflive.eu/