

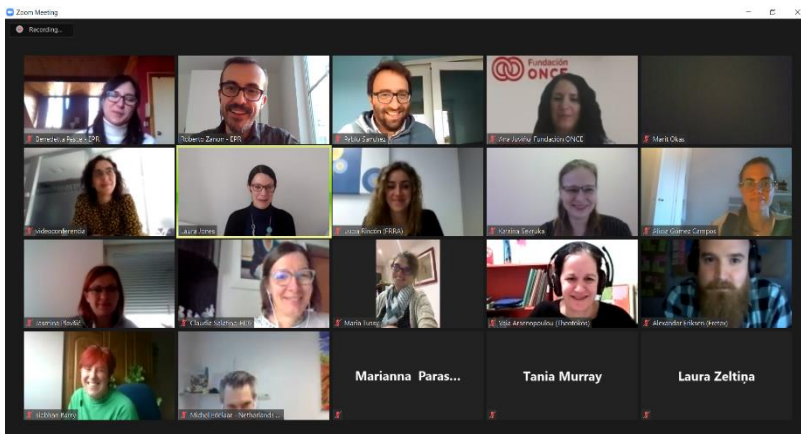
EPR EU funds webinar series

The new ESF+ programme

23 November 2020 (13.00 – 15.00 CET)

Online
Report

On the 23rd of November the Webinar on the new ESF+ Programme took place online. The meeting was organized by EPR with the aim to support its members and help them better understand how to use the new ESF+ Programme which will replace the current ESF and will be launched in 2021. Even if a final agreement has not been reached, the main content was not expected to change so the webinar aims to build capacity to benefit from the programme in the future, and learn from the experience of service providers involved in the current ESF programme.



The webinar was attended by 23 participants from 11 Countries (Belgium, Estonia, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, The Netherlands).

The meeting was opened by the Secretary General of EPR, **Laura Jones**, who presented the work that the COVID19 Coordinated Action Group Alliance is currently implementing. The group (consisting of stakeholders as service providers

networks, the Red Cross, Trade Unions and Employers in social sector, etc.) has the aim to represent the sector in the dialogue with the European Institutions about the challenges faced by the sector while adapting services under COVID19 and in accessing funding opportunities, and tries to raise awareness on the importance of the social services sector and get more support. So far the working group has implemented the following activities:

- High level and other meetings with EU institutions
- Campaign #WeAreEssentialServices
- A joint statement and draft papers on lessons learnt and resilience

The presentation continued with the introduction to the Help Desk concept that the Commission is expected to launch following a consultation with the Alliance to support social sector providers to access EU funds. The help desk should be active in different Countries, being dedicated to the programmes ERDF, ESF, REACT-EU, ESF+. The Help desk should be implemented in two phases:

1. A pilot phase in three Countries
2. Project with a call for proposals

The negotiations for the help desk are ongoing and it is hoped that an agreement would be signed by the end of 2020, but it is possible that a formal project or tender call would be launched in 2021.

The second presentation was given by **Maria Anne Paraskevas**, EU Commission – Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. She shared updates on the EU

budget for the next funding programmes, with a particular focus on the new ESF+. She gave an overview on how the new budget is being revised to give short, medium and long term responses to the current pandemic crisis. Furthermore, Ms Paraskevas gave info on the REACT EU instrument, the amendments to the current programming period 2014-2020 and the additional budget that will be distributed between ERDF, ESF+ and FEAD.

Regarding the current programmes, the implementation of the 2014-2020 ESF will continue for 3 more years. The new ESF+ Programme will begin on 2021 and the implementation will continue till 2027, plus 3 more years.

An overview of the new ESF+ proposal was then presented, with a focus on Objective 4 - *A More Social Europe* and the related specific objectives: *Employment, Education, Training, Social Inclusion*. More information can be found in the PowerPoint presentation.

The third presentation was made by **Maria Tussy Flores** from Fundación Once, National Intermediate Body of ESF in Spain. She presented the successful experience of Fundación Once in participating in 3 programming periods and investing in training and employment programs for persons with disabilities. She explained the challenges related to the negotiation process on the definition of the new ESF+ in terms of:

- Competitiveness of Europe in the global economy, ensuring high employment and social standards;
- Promotion of quality jobs and equal opportunities, quality education and training;
- Need to overcome of the economic and social crisis with higher youth unemployment rate;
- Impact of digitalization;
- Level of poverty among citizens.

Fundación Once is committed to proposing measures that would allow civil society organizations to access the ESF+, increasing the opportunities for those actions related to social inclusion objectives, without having an impact on the general budget.

The last presentation was made by **Pablo Sanchez Perez** from Fundación Intrás, Spain. His organization works in the field of for social and labour market inclusion of people with mental health issues and intellectual disabilities. He presented the experience that Intrás has in European Projects, in particular with ESF. In 1998 Intrás created a European Projects Department to manage different projects. The first project co-funded by ESF was EQUAL, aimed at helping disadvantaged people with an innovative person-oriented approach. Another important project mentioned was developed with the purpose of helping people with mental health issues through vocational training programs. Thanks to another project, on ecological agriculture for people with disabilities, Intrás created a knowledge management tool for the employment in the social sector.

Mr.Sanchez Perez has pointed out the difficulties and the strengths of the ESF, from Intrás' point of view:

- Difficulties: bureaucracy and lack of flexibility.
- Strengths: concrete results directly impacting on the beneficiaries' lives, sustainability of the results, innovative approaches to go further.

Participants were asked to rate the overall event from 1 (poor quality) to 5 (excellent). The average rating of the event was **4.3 out of 5**.

