



socialplatform

Answer to
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consultation on
ESF and social
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For ESF project outcomes with a real impact on people's lives

Social Platform is the largest civil society alliance fighting for social justice and participatory democracy in Europe. Consisting of 49 pan-European networks of NGOs, Social Platform campaigns to ensure that EU policies are developed in partnership with the people they affect, respecting fundamental rights, promoting solidarity and improving lives.

platform@socialplatform.org | www.socialplatform.org | [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#)

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1. How to involve civil society organisations to ensure higher rates of success of ESF projects

The 'partnership principle' requires Member States to involve civil society in the design, implementation, and evaluation of ESF.

In order to reach more people with specific needs through a person-centred approach, the multidimensional problems they face need to be at the centre of financial support. Therefore, authorities at national, regional and local levels, should cooperate more with people with specific needs, organisations representing them, and service providers, to meet the different needs of these vulnerable people.

The involvement of civil society organisations was limited in the current funding period. A more consistent and meaningful involvement of civil society in the preparation of Operational Programmes and in Monitoring Committees should be a priority in the future.

Civil society often works directly with or represents vulnerable groups that the ESF targets, and their expertise and ability to reach out to these groups is essential for ensuring successful outcomes of future ESF+ projects. Their involvement in the design of future ESF+ initiatives can help to ensure that eligibility criteria issued by managing authorities are not excessively strict, enabling civil society to also apply for funding to carry out projects.

2. How to reduce the limits of the cost-effectiveness approach

The allocation of ESF resources to Member States and regions has been based primarily on GDP. However, GDP is a purely economic measure, which may not capture social problems within a country or region, which raises questions on whether ESF resources are targeted to the people that need them most.

The "[social scoreboard](#)" does not yet allow to measure well enough all social inclusion issues. It overlooks key trends, such as the deterioration of the effectiveness of our social protection systems, persistence and depth of poverty and social exclusion, rising precariousness in employment, in-work poverty, and housing affordability, as well as funding towards the development of community-based services.

Civil society has played a positive role in providing the institutions involved in the European Semester process with up-to-date data and information about the challenges at national, regional and local level; as well as practical recommendations. This has not only helped to make the Semester process more in sync with the realities on the ground, it has also helped to ensure ownership of the European Semester in civil society at local, regional and national level. It is crucial that this partnership approach is continued and adequately funded to further such ownership and input. Strengthening the use of the social scoreboard to cover the above mentioned issues would help, in this regard.

Another problem is that social innovation projects/activities are often funded in their early stages without focusing on their implementation and scaling up. The current ESF does not always encourage the implementation of innovative social projects because it measures the success performance in terms of short-term economic profit, which is not always achievable for emerging forms of social innovations. The ESF favours secure and verified solutions over innovative models.

3. How to better invest in people, both at EU and national levels

The EU level has a role to play in supporting and guiding Member States' allocation of public resources; existing budgetary rules do not differentiate between investment and current expenditures. This means that to respect the rules laid down in the Stability and Growth Pact, member states cannot differentiate between cuts to social protection and services and cuts to other expenditures such as military spending. This system fails to take into account increasing evidence of the [economic and social returns](#) of certain kinds of public expenditure, particularly: early childhood education and care; primary and secondary education; training and active labour market policies; and affordable and social housing.

In order to allow for more investments in these areas, the European Commission should grant budgetary flexibility to Member States for public social investment in the short term and adapt EU macroeconomic rules in the long run. Budgetary flexibility is essential to allow Member States much needed fiscal space, and to provide [strong incentives to invest in social policies and services](#) that will make our societies and economies more resilient.

4. How to avoid the silo approach and have stronger integration of different EU funds

Some successful social innovation projects have been funded through INTERREG in the current programming period. With the draft regulations 2021-2027 now providing that future INTERREG projects could also address ESF+ related topics, stronger synergies should be sought in the future between these two funding instruments.

Synergies between Erasmus+ and ESF+ could also be fostered, for example by supporting young people's skills, and access to the labour market through ESF+, as well as offering them international mobility.

Efforts to streamline and simplify budget rules are an important development if they promote meaningful engagement of key stakeholders, including civil society organisations (CSOs) and current or future beneficiaries, who should be included as [essential partners in all stages of the programming phase and monitoring and evaluation processes](#). CSOs are essential in building vibrant local relationships, supporting participation, and strengthening connections between people. This is a vital precondition for a flourishing European society and financial resources are needed for CSOs to fulfil this function. Operational grants for EU CSOs should be continued under ESF+, the Justice, Rights and Values Programme, and other programmes.