



2016/2304(INI)

4.5.2017

OPINION

of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

for the Committee on Regional Development

on increasing engagement of partners and visibility in the performance of
European Structural and Investment Funds
(2016/2304 (INI))

Rapporteur: Claude Rolin

PA_NonLeg

SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Employment and Social Affairs calls on the Committee on Regional Development, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

- A. whereas raising the profile of EU-funded projects can play a key role in combating the shadow economy;
 - B. whereas the high degrees of synergy and significant efficiency gains which could be achieved by raising the profile of the European Structural and Investment Funds could be secured for all EU funds by implementing a similar and hence comparable communication and publicising strategy;
1. Points out that the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) comprise five different funds that are geared towards improving European citizens' quality of life; highlights the importance of the ESIF, and in particular the European Social Fund (ESF), which has proved to be one of the most important public tools in promoting growth, jobs and social inclusion and reducing regional disparities, especially with regard to the most vulnerable regions and people; underlines the added value of the ESF and the need to draw up communication plans to ensure better optimisation of the resources invested in its visibility;
 2. Notes with concern that in 2015 only 34 % of Europeans said that they had heard about projects co-financed by the EU to improve the area in which they live and to foster sustainable, inclusive growth and jobs, and that this proportion has remained unchanged since June 2010¹, and also that in 2015, 75 % of the people who were aware of the funds said that they have had a positive impact, with only 9 % saying that the impact has been negative; stresses, therefore, that there is an urgent need to improve communication strategies targeting citizens, this being all the more important in these times of challenge owing to nationalism and the spread of negativity about the European project;
 3. Calls on the Commission, in close cooperation with the local, regional and national authorities as well as the stakeholders concerned, to monitor regularly that all legal provisions as regards information and communication are being implemented thoroughly in order to ensure transparency and the widespread dissemination of information, through institutional communication, social media and any other type of informal communication, about the achievements of the Funds, paying special attention to groups of beneficiaries in vulnerable positions and the exchange of best practices between authorities and beneficiaries of the Funds;
 4. Stresses the importance of EU added value, which is one of the core principles against which spending options at EU level should be assessed; believes in this regard that all ESIF funding must be used in a way that adds value to the work already undertaken by the Member States and not to replace national approaches;
 5. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to improve the visibility of the ESIF by

¹ Flash Eurobarometer 423: Citizens' awareness and perceptions of EU regional policy.

proposing effective communication and targeted measures which can best illustrate the positive contribution of the ESIF, the European added value of the projects and how the ESIF has positively contributed towards improving the lives of European citizens on the ground, particularly in terms of job creation and social integration, as well as the possibilities offered by the ESF, in particular in terms of social inclusion and employment, through a targeted and detailed institutional communication of results achieved and projects implemented, including information events; recalls the multiplying effect that the active involvement of civil society in the development and implementation of EU grants programmes entails;

6. Draws attention to the growing importance of social media and also the dissemination of anti-European propaganda on the internet; calls on the Commission, the Member States and all stakeholders to make the best use of new communication techniques to increase the visibility of the ESIF; stresses the importance of ensuring citizen-friendly language and suggests increased use of concepts such as ‘simple language’; recommends the more intense use of social media to communicate the successes of cohesion policies and the opportunities related to their use;
7. Recognises the need to take a pedagogical approach with regard to the funds concerned so as to prevent nationalist reactions to an instrument that is based on solidarity with the most deprived regions or with the people who most need that solidarity, such as the unemployed or those at risk of social exclusion;
8. Calls on the Commission to promote partnerships, agreements and initiatives via the networks and communication channels used by the stakeholders who are most closely involved, such as the social partners and NGOs;
9. Calls on the Commission to review the provisions contained in Article 115 of, and Annex XII to, Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 to take account of the specific nature of ESF projects, which mainly focus on human capital, providing in particular the possibility to finance specific dissemination and divulgation of the activities performed and results achieved by actions funded under the ESF, taking into account that the ordinary communication and advertising standards, while well-conceived in the case of structural and technological investments, are not as effective for intangible investments in human capital;
10. Calls on the Commission to reduce the administrative burden, without affecting necessary controls and audits, with a view to ensuring a better absorption rate, in particular for SMEs, micro-businesses and companies in remote rural areas, in order to foster their capacity to create employment and add economic value, and for civil society organisations; emphasises, in that connection, the need to maintain a balance as regards the beneficiaries’ reporting obligations and accountability vis-à-vis European taxpayers, so that, in the context of the revision of a fund, sufficient data is available to improve the way in which funding is targeted;
11. Recognises the importance of the European Code of Conduct on Partnership, which governs the participation of local authorities, the social partners and other interested parties at all stages of planning, implementation and follow-up with regard to the ESIF; recalls that the partnership principle fundamentally ensures that the programming takes greater account of citizens’ needs and involves consulting stakeholders and integrating

their input; points out that civil society actors and social partners should be better involved in the development processes from an early stage and that urban and regional stakeholders should play a bigger role in the implementation of the projects to be carried out;

12. Welcomes the better application of the partnership principle in the 2014-2020 ESIF period as compared with the 2007-2013 period and recognises the contribution of the European Code of Conduct on Partnership in this regard; notes, however, that some challenges remain, in particular the difficulty of mobilising all relevant stakeholders and the lack of time to ensure partner involvement; calls on the Commission and the Member States to review the Code of Conduct in this regard and to ensure the full and effective involvement of economic and social partners and bodies representing civil society at all stages in the implementation of Partnership Agreements and programmes, and to facilitate the exchange of experience and good practices;
13. Recognises that the ESF has taken on new challenges and that there is a need to step up social dialogue; emphasises the importance of ensuring adequate participation, at EU, national and regional level, of the social partners, thereby facilitating their involvement, in all stages of planning, implementation, supervision and assessment of the use of the ESIF; calls on the Commission to ensure and monitor adequate resources for social partners in this regard, as allocated under Article 6 of Regulation (EU) No 1304/2013;
14. Recalls the empowering effect of early-stage funding and pre-financing for projects through the use of ESIF;
15. Underlines the importance of the Tripartite ESF Committee, which facilitates the administration of the ESF by Member States, and calls on the Commission to consider the creation of similar committees for the other ESIFs in light of the added value created by social dialogue;
16. Stresses the importance of the integration of refugees as an urgent policy matter in the aftermath of the refugee crisis; insists, in this regard, on appropriate allocation of the funds, flexible use of funds, and more appropriate targeting of the risk groups, in order to mitigate the risk of exclusion and social tensions;
17. Calls on the Commission to analyse the real impact of investing EU funds during the previous programming period and to draw specific conclusions regarding the positive and negative experiences as a starting point for adding value to the investment process;
18. Calls on the Commission to adopt instruments able to assess not only the quantity but also the quality of the jobs created, as precarious types of employment without adequate safeguards or contracts that involve the exploitation of workers contribute to a negative perception of the cohesion policies;
19. Believes that one of the greatest challenges is the capacity of regions and partners to use and access EU funding streams; calls on the Member States which have not done so, or which have done so to a lesser extent, to devote an appropriate part of the ESF resources to strengthening the institutional capacity of public authorities and relevant partners in order to ensure in particular an effective partnership and an adequate funding allocation; calls on the Commission to ensure that both the allocated budget of 20 % of the ESF for social inclusion and the minimum guaranteed ESF share in each Member State is fully

achieved;

20. Calls on the Commission to ensure that the Member States know the exact finalities of the ESF priorities relating to the partnership involvement, and to accompany them in the realisation of these priorities through the identification and dissemination of best practices; in this context, calls on the Commission to monitor, and to include in the annual implementation report on the ESF programmes, the progress made in the activities carried out in the Member States in this regard, with the purpose of ensuring compliance with the requirement for adequacy of resources;
21. Calls for participatory outcome assessments to be carried out with beneficiaries, local and regional authorities, associations, the social partners and other stakeholders in order to gather relevant data with a view to boosting active participation and visibility with regard to future action;
22. Underlines concerns regarding the exclusion of some regions or municipalities from financing due to the increase in public debt, since this increase usually stems from the activities of the central authorities;
23. Calls on the Member States to ensure a straightforward and transparent management of the ESIF;
24. Stresses that there is a particular need at EU and Member State level to improve simplification for beneficiaries, with more precise targeting to meet their needs; believes, in this regard, that the social partners and stakeholders could contribute to the identification of both good and bad practices and help in introducing simplification options in their respective Member States; underlines that the simplification efforts should not only target beneficiaries, and calls on the Commission to concentrate its simplification efforts also on those responsible for managing and implementing the Cohesion Policy;
25. Underlines that in order to achieve the impact and the added value of ESIF a 'one size fits all' approach cannot work in practice, and that impact indicators in addition to the quantitative analysis should be introduced; calls for the ESIF to allow for appropriate flexibility in their design in order to allow Member States and partner organisations to implement individualised support in line with local needs, without compromising on audit and control; considers that ESIF should address the specific situations and should take into account different social and economic realities.

INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

Date adopted	3.5.2017
Result of final vote	+: 45 -: 3 0: 1
Members present for the final vote	Laura Agea, Guillaume Balas, Brando Benifei, Mara Bizzotto, Vilija Blinkevičiūtė, Ole Christensen, Lampros Fountoulis, Elena Gentile, Arne Gericke, Marian Harkin, Czesław Hoc, Danuta Jazłowiecka, Agnes Jongerius, Rina Ronja Kari, Jan Keller, Ádám Kósa, Kostadinka Kuneva, Jean Lambert, Jérôme Lavrilleux, Jeroen Lenaers, Verónica Lope Fontagné, Javi López, Thomas Mann, Dominique Martin, Anthea McIntyre, Elisabeth Morin-Chartier, Emilian Pavel, Marek Plura, Sofia Ribeiro, Robert Rochefort, Claude Rolin, Anne Sander, Sven Schulze, Romana Tomc, Yana Toom, Ulrike Trebesius, Marita Ulvskog, Renate Weber, Tatjana Ždanoka, Jana Žitňanská
Substitutes present for the final vote	Georges Bach, Heinz K. Becker, Lynn Boylan, Tania González Peñas, Paloma López Bermejo, Edouard Martin, Tamás Meszerics, Flavio Zanonato
Substitutes under Rule 200(2) present for the final vote	Mireille D'Ornano

FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

45	+
ALDE	Marian Harkin, Robert Rochefort, Yana Toom, Renate Weber
ECR	Arne Gericke, Czesław Hoc, Anthea McIntyre, Ulrike Trebesius, Jana Žitňanská
EFDD	Laura Agea
GUE/NGL	Lynn Boylan, Tania González Peñas, Rina Ronja Kari, Kostadinka Kuneva, Paloma López Bermejo
PPE	Georges Bach, Heinz K. Becker, Danuta Jazłowiecka, Ádám Kósa, Jérôme Lavrilleux, Jeroen Lenaers, Verónica Lope Fontagné, Thomas Mann, Elisabeth Morin-Chartier, Marek Plura, Sofia Ribeiro, Claude Rolin, Anne Sander, Sven Schulze, Romana Tomc
S&D	Guillaume Balas, Brando Benifei, Vilija Blinkevičiūtė, Ole Christensen, Elena Gentile, Agnes Jongerius, Jan Keller, Javi López, Edouard Martin, Emilian Pavel, Marita Ulvskog, Flavio Zanonato
VERTS/ALE	Jean Lambert, Tamás Meszerics, Tatjana Ždanoka

3	-
ENF	Mireille D'Ornano, Dominique Martin
NI	Lampros Fountoulis

1	0
ENF	Mara Bizzotto

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention