Improving collaboration to support the integration of long-term unemployed and inactive people: a mini-toolkit

ESF Transnational Cooperation Platform

Community of Practice on Employment, Education and Skills

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Contents

What is the European Social Fund (ESF) Transnational Cooperation Platform?

Mutual learning is at the core of the ESF Transnational Cooperation Platform and its four Communities of Practice (CoP): employment, education and skills; social inclusion; results-based management; and social innovation.

The ESF Transnational Cooperation Platform gives CoP members, including managing authorities, intermediate bodies and other ESF stakeholders, the opportunity to participate in mutual learning activities and tackle common challenges together. The CoPs were created as a place for members to share ideas and concerns, deepen knowledge and expertise, and help one another to solve problems with practical approaches.

The mutual learning activities generate hands-on outputs such as toolkits, guides, practice mapping, checklists and recommendation papers that can inspire practitioners and policymakers alike.

1.   Introduction

1.1.   About the mini toolkit

This mini toolkit presents information on **concepts, tools, and practices** which can support stakeholders in using European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) resources to assist in the integration of people furthest from the labour market, including long-term unemployed and inactive people, including older jobseekers. It will also demonstrate the advantages of effective working in partnership including from the encouragement of consortia to develop bids.

The mini toolkit offers advice on how best to utilise working in partnership to promote training and employment opportunities. The mini toolkit can therefore illustrate how encouragement of partnerships by *managing authorities* and *intermediate bodies* and agreements by *non-governmental organisations (NGOs)* to combine to deliver projects in response to Calls for Proposals can further the role of ESF+ in establishing integrated pathways. This includes design and implementation of tracking and support systems through the implementation of 'distance travelled'[1] models. If shared between support organisations these can assist in helping long-term unemployed (LTU) and inactive people to secure sustainable employment.

The mini toolkit is aimed at *managing authorities*, *intermediate bodies, and non-governmental organisation*s. It is particularly intended to assist managing authorities in encouraging strategic responses to Calls for Proposals for integration projects. It emphasises the advantages that can be achieved through project beneficiaries combining to establish consortia to deliver specific projects. The mini toolkit will therefore describe methods for facilitating inter-agency co-operation through effective working in partnership to support the formulation of bids offering proposals for LTU support.

The long-term unemployment Recommendation

> The Council Recommendation of 15th February 2016 on the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market (2016/C 67/01)[2] recommends that Member States **'support the registration of jobseekers and a closer labour-market orientation of integration measures, inter alia, through a closer link with employers; provide individual assessments to registered long-term unemployed persons; and make a specific offer of a job-integration agreement at the very latest when a long-term unemployed person has reached 18 months of unemployment.'**

1.2.   Background to ESF+

Since its inauguration in 2019 the current **European Commission has emphasised the social dimension of the Union**. This has been illustrated through the development of an

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[1] Distance travelled refers to the progress clients or programme participants make in terms of achieving outcomes that subsequently lead towards sustained employment. See Dewson S et al (2000) Measuring Soft Outcomes and Distance Travelled. A Review of Current Practice, DfEE Research Brief No 219,7th August 2000 London DfEE. Available at :https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130402140928/https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/RB219.pdf

[2] Council Recommendation of 15 February 2016 on the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market (2016/C 67/01), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32016H0220%2801%29

Action Plan for Delivery of the European Pillar of Social Rights[3]. The Social Pillar is comprised of a set of twenty principles and rights essential for fair and well-functioning labour markets and welfare systems. The main European instrument for **investing in people is the ESF+.** It will support employment and labour mobility, education, social inclusion, including contributing to poverty eradication, thereby contributing to the policy objective of 'a more social and inclusive Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights.[4]'

ESF+ objectives

The ESF+ has several specific objectives. Member States are required to ensure adequate participation of social partners and civil society organisations in the delivery of employment of employment, education, and social inclusion policies supported by ESF+. Member States should therefore allocate an appropriate amount of ESF+ resources in each programme for the capacity building of social partners and civil society.

For more information on the ESF+, please click on the following link: https://ec.europa.eu/european-social-fund-plus/en/what-esf

Value of promoting partnerships

The ESF+ offers new opportunities for working in partnership[5]. It promotes the involvement of all stakeholders through different stages of implementation, especially partnerships between actors at relevant territorial levels and socio-economic actors essential for implementing social innovation and experimentation[6]. The European Commission has recognised[7] that managing authorities can encourage working in partnership to support organisations combining to redesign delivery mechanism assisting vulnerable clients. This can be especially achieved through emphasising bottom-up approaches based on partnerships and the values of co-creation, involving organisations such as social partners, civil society and other organisations.

1.3. Advantages arising from working in partnership

A group of partners can come together in a partnership to deliver integration services for vulnerable long-term unemployed and inactive clients using ESF+ funding. This can facilitate new approaches to test innovative ideas generated by constituent organisations within a consortium. Long-term unemployed people may need to deal with a variety of non-employment related health and social problems before specific labour market integration issues can be directly and successfully addressed. So, testing and evaluating a range of measures can be of benefit in increasing the overall volume of positive outcomes as compared to what could be achieved by individual organisations operating in isolation.

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[3] European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan published 4th March 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-action-plan_en

[4] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32021R1057&from=EN#d1e1432-21-1

[5] See Daverrn E Nuun A Scopetta A (2021) The Power of PES Partnerships PES Network Stakeholder Conference synthesis paper.

[6] Social innovation means policy interventions that aim to provide an innovative response to social needs, implemented on a small scale and in conditions that enable their impact to be measured prior to being implemented in other contexts including geographical and sectoral ones, or on a larger scale, if the results seem convincing.

[7] European Commission (2021) Second conference of the Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) programme Background Paper "Supporting the implementation of the European Pilar of Social Rights and synergies with other EU programmes and initiatives "Written by ICF and the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research. Online 23/24 March 2021

Partnerships can facilitate actions through their combined efforts which are beyond the capacity of any single project partner. Integrated policy responses can be formulated to better target resources on the most deprived people to deliver person centred and more holistic approaches.

In encouraging collective actions, managing authorities can promote the more efficient use of ESF+ resources. A partnership approach to delivery of support activities can particularly improve managing authorities' strategic policy implementation through multi-level arrangements including through the facilitation of devolved funding and service delivery to local partnerships and community structures[8].

Managing authorities and intermediate bodies can secure benefits from creating the conditions for partnerships including:

- Promotion of social and economic inclusion.

- Attaining inclusion through increased co-ordination between desired policy outcomes and programmes.

- Enhanced adaptation of programmes to meet specific needs of defined target groups.

- Presenting opportunities to pilot new projects delivering integration services.

- Involving specialist actors in the definition of priorities and development of action plans.

- Enhanced co-operation during implementation and delivery of strategies and programmes.

Managing authorities can foster capacity building amongst project partners and strengthen social support infrastructure through strategic steering of their programme planning. This can take place via encouraging strategic responses (for example, from combinations of specialist organisations) to calls for proposals for projects to support the integration of long-term unemployed people. The City of Munich Employment and Qualification Programme (see box below) provides a model of strategic steering by a supervising authority to maximise the added value and input from specialist support organisations.

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[8] See Stott L & Scopetta A (2011) Promoting Transnational Learning using a critical friend peer review process in the Community of Practice on Partnership in the European Social Fund

Reducing long-term unemployment – The City of Munich Employment and Qualification Programme (MBQ)

The Munich Employment and Qualification Programme (MBQ)[9] has been the City of Munich's principal labour market policy instrument since 1993. It currently funds more than 110 projects providing advice, qualifications, and employment opportunities to more than 6,000 people each year.

Reducing long-term unemployment is one of the four priority areas for the MBQ programme. The target group are long-term unemployed people for whom it is difficult to find work and who have fewer opportunities than other unemployed people who are in receipt of unemployment benefit. The programme has goals to promote; social stabilisation, help participants become more readily employable, and to promote the integration of long-term unemployed people into the labour market.

It supports a Work Prospects Project (VPA) which is a partnership delivered through a networked strategy. It comprises the City of Munich Local Employment and Qualification Policy Unit, the Department of Labour and Economic Development, the Housing and Migration Office of the City of Munich Social Services Department, and 16 independent locally based NGO consulting and qualification providers. This strategic collaboration enables the application of an intersectional approach so that complex multi-faceted barriers to integration can be addressed. The project offers specialist personalised support meeting the needs of long-term unemployed people. This includes activities designed to address barriers faced by migrants, young people, and women facing labour market discrimination.

1.4. How can working in partnership positively influence European policy implementation?

Through encouraging the development of partnerships, managing authorities can both improve their own policy making capacity and foster improved outcomes from ESF+ supported delivery projects. Working in partnership can therefore have a positive impact on implementation of European policy for several reasons, which include:

- Enabling a more customer-centric approach to delivering outcomes overcoming constraints from approaches driven by rigid national strategies.

- Fuller consideration of factors specific to certain geographies and client groups.

- Increasing opportunities for development of good practice on the ground, providing practical learning for managing authorities, intermediate bodies, and stakeholders to improve Operational Programmes (OPs) and project implementation.

Successful working in partnership has multiple benefits

Successful working in partnership can influence and improve:

- Delivery of existing integration policy for long-term unemployed persons in a specific locality, region, and at the national level and European level.

- Development of new programmes on regional, national and European level.

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[9] https://www.mbq-projekte.de/index.php

- Resource allocation to ensure that adequate funding is available for individual elements providing the full range of specialist support for long-term unemployed people facing multiple barriers to integration.

- Utilisation of the overall budget, which can be optimised so that programme elements addressing different challenges faced by long-term unemployed people are complimentary.

- Programme content, thereby removing gaps and eliminating duplication so that project partners working in collaboration can learn from experiences on the ground.

- Processes for developing Calls for Proposals to deliver integration projects.

1.5. How is long-term unemployment and inactivity defined?

The **standard definition of long-term unemployment** is all unemployed people with continuous periods of unemployment extending for one year or longer (52 weeks and over). It is expressed as a percentage of the overall labour force (long-term unemployment rate) and of total unemployment (incidence of long-term unemployment).[10]

In addition to long-term unemployed people, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) **definition of economic inactivity** describes this as someone not part of the labour force, meaning that they are neither employed nor unemployed. Specifically, it refers to people who are not working or seeking work (over the previous four weeks, or available for work within two weeks). The ILO definition includes people in education or training, retired, suffering from illness or disability, and people with caring responsibilities. As such discouraged workers, who have ceased looking for work/believe that there is no suitable employment for them represent a comparatively small group of all inactive people[11].

The long-term unemployment Recommendation (see section 1.6 above) recognises that inactive people may encounter greater obstacles to social and economic integration than those classified as long-term unemployed people. It therefore encourages registration with a PES to enable inactive people to agree integration plans which help and signpost them to access support services. Amongst the inactive population there are discouraged workers who have ceased looking for work, believing that there are no suitable jobs available for them, and some long-term sick people and carers who would like to work if suitable support was available for them. Providing re-integration support where appropriate can mitigate the consequences of long-term detachment from the labour market (as described at 1.5 above)

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[10] See OECD ("014) Labour Force Statistics

[11] Discouraged workers accounted for 4% of inactive people in the EU in 2020 Eurostat data), with the highest share, exceeding 10% in Croatia, Italy, Latvia, and Poland.

2. Activating long-term unemployed and inactive people

2.1. Which factors influence long-term unemployment?

The **duration of unemployment** is an extremely relevant indicator. Increasing long-term unemployment (LTU) rates are likely to reflect structural labour market problems. Reducing the duration of unemployment spells should therefore be a key component of strategies to reduce overall unemployment and promote social inclusion.

The longer a person is unemployed their chances of finding a job reduce. Unemployment insurance coverage is often limited, and those most likely to be excluded from this are people entering or reinterring the labour market after spells of long-term unemployment.

Long-term unemployment is related to the personal situation of an individual, particularly affecting older or unskilled people, or those who had lost their previous jobs due to redundancy. LTU people often have low levels of educational attainment and limited skills and can often suffer from stigma which further reduces their prospects of integration.

2.2. Engagement with long-term unemployed and inactive people

Long-term unemployed and inactive people are often not registered with Public Employment Services (PES). Contacting inactive and difficult to reach groups therefore requires **close participation between public and private stakeholders**. As many inactive people and long-term unemployed people with the greatest barriers to employability are not ready to engage with the labour market, it is especially important that they can receive specialist support. Therefore, an individual may need input through services provided by a variety of organisations during their journey from inactivity to integration.

Good communication and close co-operation between groups providing support services is essential. It can be beneficial for support organisations to combine establishing effective partnerships to deliver re-integration projects. Integrated services can provide more efficient support however, they require support service organisations to be able to access to robust information systems, including through shared access to joint databases.

2.3. Outcome measures and assessing 'distance travelled' to employment[12]

'Hard outcomes' (e.g., numbers of people finding work) are not always appropriate measures to assess benefits from interventions in the course of projects to assist people furthest from the labour market. However, 'soft outcomes' can be valid measures of progression for people with complex and multiple issues who are not ready to consider employment.

Soft outcomes are outcomes from training support or guidance interventions. Soft indicators are the means by which it can be measured whether soft outcomes have been achieved.

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[12] See Dewson et al 2000

The situation of people in vulnerable groups can be considered in terms of how interventions by various actors, working in parallel or sequentially, can reduce a client's distance from the labour market.

Distance travelled refers to the progress that a beneficiary makes towards employability or harder outcomes because of a project intervention. It has developed as a way to measure the progress clients are making that may lead to sustainable employment.

A variety of support agencies, project partners and wider stakeholders, can share responsibility in an integration project. These include employment services, specialist NGOs, social services agencies, health services, social assistance organisations and housing advice agencies. As several organisations can be involved in managing and supporting a client's employability journey it makes sense for them to consider joint management and operation of integration projects.

ESF Transnational Cooperation Platform Measuring Soft Outcomes Working Group

Following discussions within the long-term unemployment Community of Practice representatives from managing authorities, intermediate bodies and other relevant stakeholders including NGOs have formed a Measuring Soft Outcomes Working Group in 2021-2022. The intention is to build upon existing evidence and practices to identify systems to be piloted to better assess the added value of ESF+ financed activities for increasing the employability of those furthest away from the labour market. The working group shared different approaches. In late 2022 and 2023 they would like to continue to work together to test approaches and share the information on their outcomes, which can feed into the production of a good practice guidance for managing authorities.

2.4.   What are the benefits of 'distance travelled' models?

Applying distance travelled methodology can have a positive impact on the benefits people obtain from participating in Active Labour Market Programmes (ALMPs). These include increasing their self-confidence, sense of purpose, well-being, self-esteem, career self-efficacy, resilience, hopefulness, and perceived progress towards labour market intervention. This can be reflected in an increase in perceived employability and entrepreneurialism.

Individual specialist provider organisations may offer in-depth assistance to meet the personal needs of particular clients. Therefore, beneficiaries can require different combinations of services to address their individual barriers to integration. Projects can therefore provide more holistic support where partners combine to design and develop integrated support packages.

Assessment and monitoring tools necessary to record client progress following the interventions of different support organisations can be provided through using distance travelled methodologies. This can facilitate positive long-term outcomes in employment programmes with encouragement of soft skills development. Clients can receive better insights into the progress that they are making, project staff are able to obtain improved data on how a project is progressing, and information is provided on to support further project development.

Potential employers, and educational establishments can be provided with **tangible evidence** that clients have increased their employability whilst funders can obtain concrete evidence of the difference made by a project or intervention even though hard outcomes may not yet have been achieved.

What are the key components of a 'distance travelled' model?

Distance travelled models have **four key components:**

- A set of indicators relating to soft outcomes that a programme wants to achieve.

- A scoring system or scale for assessing a client's progress on each indicator.

- Baseline assessments and subsequent reviews to assess progress.

- A system for analysing and reporting results.

Important considerations for introducing distance travelled systems

The monitoring of soft outcomes and measurement of a client's distance travelled should be a **mainstream activity, and integral component of employability projects**. It is important to note that gathering evidence on the impact of a project through using soft outcome measures may take longer than a traditional approach only using hard measures. This should be considered in project planning. It may be necessary to weight different measures, this can be assisted through the development of core and secondary outcomes.

2.5. What evidence is needed to measure 'distance travelled'?

Evidence of progress can be obtained from several sources:

- **Soft outcomes** can be grouped and categorised for example as: key work skills, attitudinal skills, personal skills, practical skills.

- **Hard outcomes** can be assessed through: qualification, work experience, and employment (sustainable and long-term).

- The **number of interventions** undertaken during a programme can be recorded.

- The **context for activity** can be considered, for instance: client group, timing.

Examples of measurable soft outcomes

There are several soft outcomes which can be measured. These include:

- Problem solving abilities.

- Personal attributes (such as improved self-confidence or self-esteem).

- Practical work-focussed skills (e.g.: better appreciation of the importance of time keeping in a workplace).

- Soft skills development.

- Improved individual appearance/presentation.

- Improved ability to manage and plan finances.

- Improved language, numeracy, or literacy skills.

- Better timekeeping and time management.

- Improved ability to work as part of a team.

- Ability to write a job application or prepare a CV.

2.6. How should 'distance travelled' be measured?

Distance travelled can be measured through a variety of measures and approaches. A **combination of the following could be applied**, with particular emphasis on specific tools at different stages of a project support cycle:

- Self-reporting – especially as someone is closer to integration

- Self-assessment. – particularly at the start of a programme

- A combination of hard and soft outcomes – throughout the programme

- Tests or questionnaires – at set periods during the programme

- Case worker review sessions – at set periods during the programme

2.7. Are there any crucial design features of 'distance travelled' models?

It is essential to establish the starting point for a model and to recognise that different clients need different measures. The period of distance to be measures must be defined. The timing of an assessment is important. A baseline, mid-review, or post review can be used, or alternatively continuous improvement measured throughout participation in an Active Labour Market Programme (ALMP). It is essential that measures used are appropriate for an individual client and it is important to recognise that ALMPs are designed, developed and delivered within different country and political contexts which must be considered.

Models and tools should be developed and refined in consultation with those that are likely to implement them, and the clients who will experience them. The Chimay Centre for Social Welfare in the Wallonia Region of Belgium provides an excellent example of a client-driven integration programme funded through ESF+.

Belgium Wallonia Chimay Centre for Social Welfare

The Chimay Centre for Social Welfare in the Wallonia Region of Belgium places beneficiaries at the centre of all interventions providing highly individualised interventions. It has used ESF to develop a system offering a clear integration path which provides clients with considerable autonomy to determine and choose which specific support actions they should undertake. This means that long-term unemployed people can receive support which best meets their individual needs as they can select assistance from a number of sources. The aim is to optimise the responsibility of jobseekers through providing them with a structure to make informed choices to increase the chances of a successful labour market match and sustained integration. The process starts with a detailed case interview where the individual identifies their skills, needs, and personal priorities to enable social workers and clients to co-construct integration pathways. Support workers and clients have a non-hierarchical relationship which supports positive engagement and contributes to the ethos of the Centre to encourage clients to focus on realising their aspirations.

2.8.   Key learning points and questions for consideration

Key learning points for this chapter

- The impact of long-term unemployment and inactivity is greater as time spans increase.

- Long-term unemployed and inactive people frequently face multiple barriers to labour market integration requiring an intersectional approach.

- More vulnerable clients require specialist personalised services, health and social problems may need to be addressed before clients start participation in employability programmes.

- The characteristics of long-term unemployed and inactive people means that soft measures of distance travelled towards employment can be the most appropriate metrics to be used for assessing the results of projects to support their integration.

Questions for consideration

- Does your organisation have information on potential partners, or applicant organisations, which could work with your agency to provide integrated support for long-term unemployed and inactive persons?

- Does your organisation have access to the resources necessary to introduce soft measures and tracking systems to implement distance travelled models?

- Are the information systems in use in your organisation compatible with those of potential stakeholders?

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3. Encouraging collaboration between stakeholders

Managing authorities can improve the quality of bids in response to ESF+ Calls for Proposals if they actively encourage stakeholders to combine in establishing project specific consortia to address client needs. Long-term unemployed and inactive people often face multiple barriers to labour market integration. Therefore, when developing support programmes for them, there may be a greater requirement to address multi-faceted and complex needs than is the case when designing programmes for other groups. It is therefore important to involve organisations with on the ground experience of delivering specialist support to long-term unemployed and inactive people. Encouraging consortia bids can be an effective method for sourcing the required range of expertise and specialist skills.

3.1. What is consortia bidding?

A **consortium** in the context of ESF+ is two or more potential suppliers coming together to bid during a procurement exercise launched by a managing authority. The number of potential members should be determined by the requirements of each call. The consortium should include sufficient expertise to deliver the services required to an appropriate level of quality and avoid duplication through ensuring that individual supplier organisations have a specific and unique contribution to make to a project.

3.2. When and why should consortia bids be encouraged?

Individual organisations may not be able to individually meet all the relevant requirements of a call for proposals but may, if **working collectively, be able to develop stronger better-quality bids** than any single organisation working in isolation. Dialogue with managing authorities can be more efficient and productive where one organisation takes the role as lead supplier to manage negotiations with the managing authority on behalf of the consortium.

Enhanced co-operation can provide more opportunities for stakeholders to develop **innovative, evidence-based policies**[13].

3.3. What should be covered in consortia bids?

The detail of a bid will be determined by the requirements of a managing authority, the specific call, and the characteristics of the organisations participating in the consortium. However subject to the advice taken by both managing authorities and bidding consortia, there are a **number of subjects which would be expected to be covered.** As such a response from a consortium to a call for proposals should describe the following which will support the managing authority in assessing the bid against criteria as set out in a call:

- The roles and responsibilities of each supplier organisation for delivering specific services targeted to meet identified needs of long-term unemployed persons.

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[13] See European Commission (2019) Decision of the European Parliament and Council amending Decision No 573/2014/EU on enhanced co-operation between Public Employment Services (PES): https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/LSU/?uri=celex:32014D0573

- The risks to successful delivery and mitigating actions to reduce the potential impact of these.

- The resource allocation process, including assessment of the input which may be available from individual project partners.

- The cost allocation mechanism for consortium members to ensure that funding available to each delivery partner is commensurate with their predicted input.

- Evaluation systems to ensure that activities in place to support long-term unemployed persons are having an impact.

- The overall support offering is sufficiently broad to address the needs of long-term unemployed persons through enabling an intersectional approach. This is necessary to address barriers faced by vulnerable clients due to issues such as health problems and disability.

  Analysis of the local labour market and characteristics of the target population of long-term unemployed persons.

Determining the roles of each consortium member, and any changes

As part of the selection process the managing authority will need specific information from a consortium including:

- Details of each consortium member.

- The background of member organisations in dealing with the integration of long-term unemployed people.

- The specific aspects of long-term unemployment which project partners address.

- The scale and scope of delivery obligations assigned to each member.

- Evidence that all support proposals contained in a consortium bid are informed by the needs of the local labour market to optimise the integration prospects of long-term unemployed clients.

- Each member's technical or professional input to service provision.

- The capability and experience of each supplier organisation contributing to the bid including information on provision of personalised approaches delivered as part of flexible support to meet the needs of long-term unemployed people in the locality.

- To safeguard the **integrity and quality of the bidding process,** acknowledgement from project partnerships that they understand that a bid can be excluded in the event of certain changes in the composition of the consortium. Examples justifying exclusion could include withdrawal of a member resulting in the bid no longer meeting the requirements, or changes in the partnership not being immediately reported to the managing authority.

3.4. Individual organisations' involvement in multiple bids

Individual organisations can be involved in the submission of more than one bid provided that they:

- Only submit one bid for a particular call.

- This does not result in a potential or actual conflicts of interest, supplier capacity problems, restrictions, distortions, or collusion.

It is however important to note that those organisations with most expertise in meeting the needs of long-term unemployed people may be small NGOs and community groups with limited capacity, and therefore are unable to participate in several bids at the same time. Lead organisations should take care to ensure that all bodies participating in a proposed consortium are able to deliver as required by a contract if a bid is succesful.

3.5 The role of employment services

Employment services are able to provide employment counselling, job matching, career orientation, and links with employers, have an especially vital role in providing support to facilitate the labour market integration of long-term unemployed persons. The Council Recommendation on the integration of the long-term unemployed[14] calls for jobseekers to be encouraged to register with an employment service, in particular through improved provision of information on the support available.

In many countries, public employment services (PES) have traditionally focused on matching services for individuals covered by unemployment insurance benefits but not dealt with the long-term unemployed. In these delivery models, municipalities can be the main agencies with responsibility for providing social assistance for those furthest from the labour market including the long-term unemployed. They can therefore be the agencies most likely to have existing contacts with the most vulnerable clients.

Outreach initiatives, communication strategies, and especially simplified access for potential clients are especially important for engagment with the most vulnerable clients, making them aware of potential support services. Consortia, including PES, municipal actors, other state bodies such as education institutes, and specialist NGOs, can therefore offer the best framework for the establishment of a joined up service supply chain necessary to enhance support.

Lithuania integrated case management

Lithuania has used ESF resources to pilot an integrated case management model for the effective integration of long-term unemployed people. This is intended to improve co-operation between institutions implementing Active Labour Market Programmes (ALMPs) and social support services. Long-term unemployed and inactive people often need assistance from several agencies in order to deal with multiple complex problems that present barriers to their labour market integration. A lack of co-ordination between PES and other service providers can result in disjointed delivery, preventing those furthest from the labour market from receiving the personalised support that they often require. The objective of the initiative is to deal with this issue through combining employment and social support thereby introducing a more synchronised model. This enables stakeholders to ensure provision of integrated

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[14] 10 ibid

services to meet individual needs. PES, responsible for employment services, and municipalities providing social service support, have therefore combined to introduce joint case teams where professionals including case managers offer better co-ordinated holistic support for clients.

3.6 Key learning points and questions for consideration

Key learning points for this chapter

- Consortia can provide the most effective structure for ensuring that a sufficient breadth of specialist expertise is convened to meet the requirements of a call for proposals for the integration of long-term unemployed and inactive people.

- It is important that project partnerships cover the full range of potential support requirements for long-term unemployed and inactive people. They must therefore include details of the roles and responsibilities of participating organisations, resource allocation processes and cost attribution mechanisms.

- Robust evaluation systems are necessary to ensure that consortia are having an impact in adding value through supporting the integration of long-term unemployed and inactive people.

- The Council Recommendation on the integration of the long-term unemployed[15] calls for measures to encourage client registration with employment services recognising that they are key delivery agents with a mandate to facilitate labour market integration.

- Calls for proposals from organisations combining in designing and developing bids must be informed by analysis of the local labour market and characteristics of the target population.

- Research can produce aggregate data on the numbers, age distribution, skills level, employment backgrounds, health and welfare, and the situations of potential project participants in integration activities. In conjunction with information on labour demand and recruitment trends this can assist in planning programmes which provide optimum opportunities for long-term unemployed and inactive people to secure sustainable employment.

Questions for consideration

- Does your organisation (or applicant organisations) possess the legal, technical, and financial expertise to develop and/or participate in a project partnership?

- If you do not currently have sufficient capacity to participate in a project partnership, do you have the information needed to acquire this?

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[15] See 10 ibid

4 The role of project beneficiaries and partners in projects

Selecting project beneficiaries and appropriate partners for projects aimed at long-term unemployed people is important to ensure that the partnership can cater for their real needs. In many cases, long-term unemployed people may need varied support, thus the partnership should offer a combination of support services. Project beneficiaries should also use existing data and information, where possible, to identify potential project participants – adhering to data processes and privacy rules.

4.1 Improved allocation of funding to increase the employability of vulnerable groups

When developing Calls for Proposals managing authorities need to recognise that a **combination of measures is necessary to ensure that support programmes meet the employability needs of vulnerable clients.** People furthest from the labour market need to be supported through an induction pathway involving a step-by-step approach.

As individual organisations are unlikely to offer the full range of assistance needed to enable clients to overcome barriers and develop employability skills more effective outcomes can sometimes be achieved through tenders inviting organisations to develop project partnerships. Holistic services provided by a combination of specialist organisations can therefore enable better targeting and an improved return on investment of ESF+ resource.

4.2 Components of an integration pathway

A tender can invite bids requiring **delivery of a range of services** encouraging project partners to collaborate to ensure that a comprehensive service offering is presented. This can include **assistance throughout the re-integration journey.** A project can therefore span overcoming initial barriers to labour market participation through to post-recruitment employment aftercare, e.g.: health support, childcare, basic numeracy and literacy, housing support, vocational training, job search assistance, employer outreach etc.

Successful bidders to provide comprehensive re-integration support will therefore be expected to **provide a menu of services** which accommodate clients at different stages on a re-integration journey and with a variety of support needs. The European Commission[16] has described a comprehensive support package for vulnerable young people through staged interventions. This includes outreach to contact vulnerable priority clients, addressing individual employment obstacles, personalised guidance and follow up support after labour market integration.

A structured integration pathway can provide the conceptual framework for a managing authority call for proposals. The Canadian Opportunities Fund for People with Disabilities programme[17] uses an escalator model outlining the different stages of an integration pathway (see Figure 4 below).

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[16] European Commission (2021) flexible and creative partnerships for effective outreach strategies and targeted support to young NEETs, https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServiet?docid-24058&lang=nl

[17] Information contained in OECD Labour Force Statistics (2014)

See 12 ibid

Figure 4 – Key features of successful programmes for the most vulnerable groups

Ongoing: Holistic approaches across institutions and policies, exchanging data and information					
Step 1 Identify people in need, reach out, identify needs	**Step 2: strengthen life skills, social integration, motivation**	**Step 3: Strengthen work-related skills**	**Step 4: Assist in job search**	**Step 5 (optional) Subsidised employment in the social economy, training, and mentoring**	**Step 6: Primary labour market and follow-up support**
Ongoing: Well targeted and individualised interventions					

Source: OECD Briefing: 'Tackling Coronavirus (COVID-19) contributing to a global effort (October 2021'

4.3   Increasing labour market participation for people from vulnerable groups

In designing tenders to encourage project partners to collaborate in preparing bids managing authorities should consider the **full range of services needed to identify people in need of support**. Successful support programmes must recognise the challenges clients face, ascertain why members of the target group for support are not currently accessing services, develop approaches for reaching out to vulnerable clients, and encourage the design of services providing the personalised assistance needed to foster integration.

The **situation of clients will vary greatly** between those with some labour market attachment who may be ready to participate in Active Labour Market Programmes (ALMPs) and others who first require assistance to deal with health, social, and basic education needs before they can benefit from activities to increase their employability.

Finland - The Employment Accelerator programme

The Employment Accelerator programme[18] has established a network of walk-in centres in all large cities in Finland. Different centres bring project partners together to collaborate on various shared initiatives promoted through media campaigns as part of a nationwide objective to integrate services to develop programmes based upon local specificities. The Accelerator Programme, delivered in Lahti, provides a drop-in service for unemployed people aged 30 years and over. It offers tailored one-to-one support through services including careers consultations, interview practice, and advice about CV writing. The programme also includes assistance to develop digital skills, such as creating a video CV, and delivers regular recruitment fairs and study days.

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[18] https://www.vauhdittamolahti.fi/

4.4   Analysing data to identify vulnerable clients

In countries such as **Estonia**[19] where administrative data from different systems can be linked managing authorities can analyse this to obtain information on vulnerable citizens. The **Netherlands Central Statistical Bureau** is developing a system to link public sector administrative data to support statistical research[20]. If there is insufficient access to or coverage of data managing authorities can either access survey data or provide further information or organise mapping exercises. To assist service mapping, **Statistics Finland** produces data sets containing information on provision of ALMPs and other support services[21].

Managing authorities should encourage outreach approaches to connect support services with vulnerable clients. This can be assisted by the development of data sharing protocols to identify inactive people and encourage them to participate in labour market integration programmes. Agencies delivering social assistance and disability support can be sources of information on potential project beneficiaries[22], they can share information to support working in concert with other public sector project partners and NGOs. This can further assist in the identification of people in need of assistance who are not in contact with any support agencies. Since 2018 the **Youth Guarantee Support System in Estonia** has provided a tool for municipalities to reach out to young people who are not in employment, education, or training (NEETs). The system links nine registers to provide information for case managers[23].

4.5   Establishing data management protocols to support partnerships

It is essential that organisations working in partnership to assist long-term unemployed and inactive people have a comprehensive supply of information to provide the fullest possible range of support for clients. Agencies participating in projects to promote and facilitate client integration frequently need shared access to sensitive information (i.e., data regarding social and health aspects of the client's situation) to provide the most appropriate and relevant assistance. It is essential that processes for the exchange of data are compliant with privacy rules and data protection regulations. Project staff must have the appropriate skills and expertise to understand and interpret data so that they are able to effectively use the information that they receive to inform assessments of clients' progress.

Managing authorities must establish effective mechanisms to share data in a confidential way and have transparent systems for advising clients of the data management protocols employed. **Establishing data management steering committees** with clear terms of reference, and protocols, can provide many benefits for managing authorities especially in setting standards for data exchange between delivery partners. The **Malta managing authority** is considering establishing a committee to discuss various aspects of performance evaluation. This provides a platform for various stakeholders to resolve

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[19] See OECD (2021) Improving the Provision of Active Labour Market Policies in Estonia, Connecting People with Jobs, https://doi.org/10.1787/31f72c5b-en

[20] See Kartopawiro J (2019) Secure Data Services, statistics Netherlands (CBS) https://www.oecd.org/els/emp/Kartopawiro.pdf

[21] See Statistics Finland (2021), Taikla – research data catalogue, https://taika.stat.fl/en/

[22] 13 ibid See Knole-Seidl (2020)

[23] See Kiov K, (2018) Profile of effective NEET-youth support service https://ank.ee/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/CommunityGuarantee.io1_Final_pdf

problems, share expertise and exchange views where all project partners can operate on an equal footing.

4.6   Key learning points and questions for consideration

Key learning points for this chapter

- Calls for Proposals need to recognise that a combination of measures is necessary to ensure that support programmes meet employability needs of long-term unemployed and inactive persons. A number of barriers to integration from health and social issues may need to be addressed before clients are ready to benefit from employment programmes.

- Bids should include a menu of services which accommodate the requirements of clients at different stages on a re-integration journey.

- Structured integration pathways can provide a framework for designing Calls for Proposals. These can establish a flexible structure that can be adapted so that interventions with long-term unemployed and inactive clients can be varied to match different distances from the labour market.

- Long-term unemployed and inactive persons may see little incentive to pro-actively initiate contact with support organisations, be discouraged from pursuing integration, and lack confidence in formal state agencies. Therefore, outreach approaches are necessary to connect support services with vulnerable clients, and to encourage them to participate in labour market integration programmes.

- Data sharing protocols, including client consent and transparent systems for informing clients of how data will be used are necessary to establish effective mechanisms for the confidential exchange of essential information.

- Support workers can provide greater assistance to long-term unemployed and inactive persons when fully informed of their circumstances and situations. This contributes to developing an essential trusting relationship with a client but requires confidential information to be handled sensitively.

Questions for consideration

- Has your organisation (or an applicant organisation) identified the menu of services necessary to construct an integration pathway which can provide a systematic integration programme for priority vulnerable clients?

- Does your organisation (or an applicant organisation) have access to the data systems and outreach structures necessary for identifying clients to be invited to participate in integration projects?

5 How to facilitate working in partnership

Partnerships can develop from administrative agreements facilitated at a specific level of governance, often at the local or regional tier. This provides a framework generating closer cooperation and the potential combining of services by organisations coming together to offer a menu of services to meet the needs of a particular contract and/or proposal. However, working in partnership can be generated through other means (see the box below).

Drivers for partnership development

The OECD has identified three primary situations which can provide **impetus to working in partnership**[24]:

- Locally or 'bottom up' driven where the need for better co-operation and co-ordination of activities is recognised by potential project partners (especially NGOs) on the ground.

- Policy driven, or 'top down' when the central level considers the partnership approach to be the correct one for the solution to a certain type of problem.

- Incentive driven, in that money is offered for a certain type of activity.

5.1 Key considerations for facilitating working in partnership

Both managing authorities and potential project providers **can actively contribute to partnership formation**. Project descriptions can be designed to encourage potential provider organisations to collaborate formulating joint bids in response to Calls for Proposals to integrate vulnerable people, particularly long-term unemployed people.

Whilst it is essential that managing authorities must ensure effectiveness, value for money, and integrity, unnecessarily rigid procedures can prevent adaptations to meet the needs of citizens as driven by changing external conditions. A failure to reflect changing societal needs, labour market conditions, and technological developments can result in the formulation of Calls which do not present a good 'strategic fit' and poorly executed projects. Flexibility within the legal frame is therefore essential.

This can be assisted through both initiatives to **improve internal strategic design and facilitating joint working** between organisations at the project delivery level on the ground. Such a '**two-pronged approach'** can therefore improve the quality, effectiveness, and consistency of the assistance from ESF+ funds, European social and economic inclusion strategies, and the success of Operational Programmes.

Managing authorities can examine **communication channels and convene regular co-ordination platforms** where lessons learned from previous projects can be considered. This analysis can feed into improved specification of future Calls. This can be especially useful in addressing identified duplication and fragmentation and improving the extent to which future projects support Operational Programmes contributing towards the strategic objectives of ESF+ (see Section 3.4).

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[24] OECD (2006) Successful partnerships a guide

Increased **strategic engagement of managing authorities with beneficiaries** can also further refine Operational Programme implementation, both in terms of better strategic design and more effective project monitoring and evaluation. So, in addition to internal reflections managing authorities should actively pursue dialogue with relevant external stakeholders, including potential project partners in NGO who are involved in delivering activities in the field.

Regular review panels where **managing authorities meet with representatives from intermediate bodies and beneficiaries** can provide a forum to improve the planning and implementation of OPs through review of previous activities to support potential adjustments.

Areas of improvement for consideration could include:

- Analysis of potential client needs based upon most recent data.

- Refinements to project outcome measurement systems.

- Development of project implementation guidance and proposed implementation standards.

- Building knowledge management systems to assist managing authorities, intermediate bodies, and beneficiaries to have access to a consistent store of reliable information to develop improved responses to emerging challenges in integrating clients.

Example criteria for Calls for Proposals

Closer collaboration and working in partnership between potential project partners can be facilitated and fostered through the inclusion by managing authorities of **certain criteria in calls.** Examples for projects targeting integration of long-term unemployed and inactive people could include:

- Requesting that applicants have evidence or previous projects that describe prior partnerships or collaboration with other organisations to illustrate complementarity.

- Seeking descriptions of how proposed activities complement rather than duplicate other services aimed at a target group in a specific area.

- Describing the integration milestones which a particular provider organisation will be expected to contribute towards and how they propose to align their input with other organisations' support activities.

5.2 Key learning points and questions for consideration

Key learning points for this chapter

- The impetus for partnership development can be 'bottom up' driven by local developments or 'top down' generated by policy developments regarding long-term unemployed and inactive persons, and incentive driven following the identification of resource to meet a specific requirement.

- Both managing authorities and potential project partners can actively contribute to partnership formation. Project descriptions can be designed to encourage potential provider organisations with different specialisms in supporting long-term unemployed and inactive persons to collaborate.

- Effective communication channels and regular co-ordination platforms can enable lessons learned from previous projects to be considered to improve the quality of future Calls for Proposals and bids.

- Regular review panels where managing authorities meet with representatives from intermediary bodies and beneficiaries can provide a forum to improve the planning and implementation of Operational Programmes.

Questions for consideration

- Does your organisation (or applicant organisations) have structures in place to facilitate joint working and co-ordinate project delivery with partners?

- Does your organisation (or an applicant organisation) have a communication strategy to ensure that project partners and clients are in receipt of all information necessary so that the different components of an integration package are fully aligned to provide holistic personalised support?

6 Designing a partnership for project delivery

6.1 Convening a partnership project

Successful partnerships for delivery services can **enhance the implementation of policy legislation, and activity** through improving design and management of projects. This approach can ensure that specialist organisations define their contributions in a co-ordinated way to develop innovative solutions to foster integration.

The partnership itself should focus upon effective management so that the **overall contribution from individual organisations is greater than the sum of their individual contributions** through different project partners coming together to deliver specialist support activities based on solving a particular problem within the parameters of a project.

The ability to learn from practical experience of implementation can be included as a component of a call for proposals from a managing authority.

When organisations are considering exploring the development of a partnership, they should ensure that their potential contribution and those of possible project partners, can meet the real needs of the target group of long-term unemployed people.

6.2   Problem and objective assessment

A group of stakeholders seeking to develop a delivery partnership to implement a project should initially conduct a '**problem and objective assessment'**. This is a vehicle to:

- Engage different stakeholder organisations in discussion to identify and analyse all issues pertinent to a particular problem.

- Create common ownership as to the reasons for instigating the project delivery partnership.

- Provide the rationale for the project delivery partnership.

- Identify duplication to rationalise individual organisations input to the project, and ascertain where gaps need other organisations to be invited to join.

The 'problem and objective assessment' is an exercise which **can identify concerns and pool knowledge** to reach a shared understanding of the nature of the problem, and the range of potential solutions which could populate a bid in response to a specific call for proposals.

6.2.1   Problem assessment

The social and labour market exclusion of individuals is a consequence of **the cause and effect of a sequence of problems**. A tangible and specific factual description of problems encountered by potential project clients must be agreed between potential project partners. Once the primary problem has been clarified stakeholders can input ideas as to associate secondary problems which are either a cause or effect of the key problem to be solved by the project. A **problem assessment exercise** enables a hierarchy of cause and effect to be identified revealing a continuous negative cycle.

Problem and objective assessment exercise

The EQUAL programme has produced a useful guide[25] that includes comprehensive information and tips on how to complete a problem assessment and how to complete an objective assessment.

The guide also includes an example of how to construct a problem assessment and objective assessment. More information can be found online by clicking the following website link: https://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal_consolidated/data/document/pdtoolkit_en.pdf

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[25] European Commission (2005) 'EQUAL Partnership Development Toolkit'
    (https://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal_consolidated/data/document/pdtoolkit_en.pdf)

6.2.2 Objective assessment

Following a problem assessment to identify and analyse problems which stakeholders can combine to resolve an **objective assessment** identifies specific objectives for a project designed to resolve specific problems identified through the initial problem assessment (see Figure 6 below).

Figure 6 – Initial problem assessment

Problem		Objectives
Disabled people do not enter the labour market in sufficient numbers	To	Disabled people eagerly entering the labour market
Businesses rarely hire disabled people	To	Businesses regularly hire people with disabilities

Source: Equal Partnership Development Toolkit (European Commission, 2005)

Project partners can then consider activities necessary to deliver the objectives identified through the objective assessment process and plot these to convert the **cause-and-effect hierarchy created through problem assessment exercise into a means to an end hierarchy**.

Following an objective assessment project partners can reflect on the original problem and confirm that they can contribute with activities to resolve this, thereby justifying their participation. The stakeholders forming the project delivery partnership will now be able to identify how they can individually contribute to a positive cycle of project objectives which support resolution of the problem initially identified.

6.3 Key learning points and questions for consideration

Key learning points for this chapter

- Individual organisations working in partnership is greater than the sum of their individual contributions.

- Development of delivery partnerships and project implementation can be assisted through exercises to conduct 'problem and objective assessments.'

Questions for consideration

- Does your organisation (or applicant organisations) have systems for reviewing, analysing, and storing information obtained from the implementation of project activities so that experiences of 'on the ground delivery' can be used in planning future initiatives?

- Does your organisation (or applicant organisations) have project management expertise necessary for the successful delivery of initiatives combining implementation of activities with other organisations?

Further resources

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https://ec.europa.eu/european-social-fund-plus/en/publications/guidebook-how-esf-managing-authorities-and-intermediate-bodies-support-partnership

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