

# **Report from the meeting of coordinators dealing with social policies in macro- regional strategies**

**20/21 September 2018  
Bratislava, Slovakia**

## **Report**

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## Report of the meeting

Participants highlighted the benefits of macro-regional strategies (MRS) for the social policies. MRS can be seen as catalysts for various types of cooperation. They are not directly funding related, but are delivering concrete initiatives at the interfaces of policy, programmes, and interrelated projects. In the future MFF, it will be crucial to establish sound links not only between cohesion policy and the MRS, but also with the European Pillar of Social Rights. In the future, it will be essential to develop a joint message from the four MRS related to social policies and make use of plain language. In this respect, the task of the thematic coordinators is twofold:

1. Promoting the 'macro-regional method/framework' within the context of social policies on the different levels;
2. Promoting social policies within the framework of macro-regional strategies.

Participants welcomed the establishment of the two ESF networks in the Baltic Sea Region and the Danube Region, which provide valuable platforms to discuss transnational activities in the ESF. These networks could potentially serve as model for the other macro-regional strategies, the strategies for the Alpine Region and the Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region. Moreover, valuable experiences from the past such as the EQUAL initiative should be considered.<sup>1</sup> Participants emphasized the MRSs' potential for better spending of the ESF and for cross-fund and -programme activities (policy coherence). In this context, it should be borne in mind that the ESF MA networks were the result of political initiatives on the minister's level. Coordinators stated that confusion between the potential new transnational element(s) of the ESF+ and MRS should be avoided and synergies be exploited. Coordinators proposed to present the successes of MRS to the ESF Committee to enhance the visibility of MRS to the social policy makers.

Coordinators also underlined the importance of the commitment of their respective committee members from the states participating in MRS. In some strategies, education is also a horizontal element that is relevant to all policy areas. The coordinators discussed some of the main levels of education, labour market and social policies such as

- Vocational education and training/dual education systems;
- Fighting poverty and social inclusion;
- Roma integration (especially in the Danube Region);
- Migration, which has become a crucial topic not only since 2015.

Migration could be a topic that would be tackled jointly across MRS. Coordinators stressed that MRS are also essential tools to link the Union's policies with the different cooperation formats with the (potential) candidate countries, as well as countries of the European Neighbourhood and other third countries such as Russia, Norway, Switzerland, or Liechtenstein.

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<sup>1</sup> The EQUAL Community Initiative was financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) and co-funded by the EU Member States within the 2000-2006 programming period. The initiative focused on supporting innovative, transnational projects aimed at tackling discrimination and disadvantage in the labour market. These projects were created to generate and test new ideas with the aim of finding new ways of fighting all forms of discrimination and inequality within and beyond the labour market.

Several projects and initiatives on the macro-regional level were presented to the participants:

- The Baltic Sea Labour Forum, the EUSBSR flagship;
- The School2Work, the EUSBSR flagship;
- International activities of the Vienna Board of Education;
- The Territorial Action Plan for Employment initiative of the Hungary-Slovakia Interreg programme;
- The Construction Academy in the Republic of Moldova.

### Outcomes and next steps

Coordinators of social policies in the macro-regional strategies agreed on the following next steps:

- Coordinators will continue their mutual dialogue to strengthen the social dimension within macro-regional strategies;
- Coordinators consider joint initiatives across macro-regional strategies to tackle challenges related to migration;
- Valuing the ongoing cooperation with the Commission (DG Employment), Coordinators expressed their interest to present the successes of macro-regional strategies jointly at the occasion of one of the upcoming ESF Committees;
- Participants highlighted the added value of established ESF Managing Authorities Networks in the Baltic Sea region and the Danube Region, and are committed to explore this opportunity also for other macro-regions.

## Participants

Surname	Name	City	Country	Institution	MRS role
Akhutina	Daria	Stockholm	Sweden	Council of Baltic Sea States	EUSBSR flagship leader
Anderzon	Gunnar	Solna	Sweden	Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions	EUSBSR flagship leader
Bergström	Anders	Stockholm	Sweden	Norden Association	EUSBSR Policy Coordinator “Education”
Canè	Jader	Brussels	Belgium	European Commission	DG Employment
Fenyvesi-Kiss	Boglarka	Trento	Italy	Autonomous Province of Trento	EUSALP Action Group Leader “Labour Market, Education & training”
Hanak	Roland	Vienna	Austria	Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer protection	EUSDR Priority Area Coordinator 9 “People and Skills”
Holop	Silvester	Budapest	Hungary	Joint Secretariat Interreg HU-SK	observer
Johnson	Toby	Brussels	Belgium	European Association for Information on Local Development	observer
Mirtl	Jörg	Turku	Finland	Interact Programme	MRS cross-fertilization
Simpson	Stuart	Vienna	Austria	Vienna Board of Education	EUSDR project leader
Smirnova	Masha	Brussels	Belgium	Social Platform	observer
Willsberger	Barbara	Vienna	Austria	Lechner & Reiter Social Research	EUSDR Priority Area 9 “People and Skills”