



Summary Report

ESF Transnational Cooperation Platform

Community of Practice on Social Inclusion

Peer-to-peer training on programming actions to fight Child Poverty in the ESF+

26-27 January 2021, online event

The peer-to-peer training aimed at supporting the Community of Practice (CoP) Social Inclusion members to programme actions to address Child Poverty in the context of the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+).

The peer-to-peer training, organised by the ICF Transnationality Team on behalf of the European Commission, was attended by 20 participants who represented managing authorities (MA), intermediate bodies (IB) as well as national and EU-level stakeholders.

MAs and IBs from Belgium, Greece, Spain, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Malta, Poland, Portugal and Slovakia joined the meeting. The aim of the peer-to-peer training was to support the development of knowledge and competencies for ESF+ programming to fight Child Poverty, drawing on the experience of countries more developed in using the ESF for actions to support children in need.

The first day of the peer-to-peer training was opened by the Chair of this CoP Social Inclusion, Ruth Pritchard from Pobal in Ireland, who introduced the objectives of the CoP, as well as the format and aims of the peer-to-peer training.

Maria-Anna Paraskeva from the European Commission emphasised that fighting Child Poverty is an extremely important topic for the EU. She pointed out that the scope of funding under the ESF+ is broader than with the ESF; the former will include activities that in the programming period 2014-2020 were supported through the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) and can therefore include objectives that are not directly linked to the labour market. On 28 January 2021, an agreement was reached where all EU Member States have the obligation to support structural changes and reforms for addressing Child Poverty. For Member States with an average of EU poverty higher than the 2017-2019 EU average (23,4%), it is required to earmark at least 5% of their ESF+ financial resources for this purpose.

In order to learn from programming the ESF, CoP members presented how they used the funds in the ending programming period. Matúš Tluščák from the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family in Slovakia, presented the National Project 'Support for the Deinstitutionalisation of Substitute Care in Facilities', which successfully increased the number of children raised in their own families via staff training, outreach and counselling. Joanna Bogaj-Maciejewska from the Polish Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy outlined the ESF support in Poland in the field of early childhood education and care and family support; lessons learnt included a more strategic allocation of funds with a focus on needs and finances in municipalities. Julieta Albuquerque from the Cohesion and Development Agency in Portugal introduced the specific training offer addressed to local

teams and the 'positive parenthood' initiative, aiming at empowering vulnerable households via local and early interventions.

On the second day, Bianca Faragau from EUROCITIES and Elizabeth Gosme from COFACE Families Europe presented examples of interventions to tackle Child Poverty in a two-generation approach. Bianca Faragau presented the ESF-funded project *Hela Familjen* in Malmo, Sweden, aiming at reducing Child Poverty by helping parents to (re-)enter the labour market and be self-sufficient. Elizabeth Gosme explained that projects focussing on family support and improving the work-life balance of parents and carers, on gender equality between men and women, on investment in early childhood education and care as well as on poverty prevention and early intervention are also needed to tackle Child Poverty.

Main messages from the event

Identifying factors that mitigate Child Poverty

- Robust, disaggregated **data and indicators** are crucial to prevent, mitigate and monitor Child Poverty. A thorough analysis should take into consideration national, regional and local levels. Participatory research methods (e.g. survey and interviews with children) are also a valuable resource to provide information that help identifying the right factors that mitigate Child Poverty.
- The focus needs to be on the **whole family**, via family support targeted at both adults and directly at children and early intervention. The prevention of Child Poverty can be facilitated by early warning systems set up by local services working in an integrated manner.

Defining target groups

- Target groups should be identified through a **local, place-based approach**, involving **practitioners**, such as professionals working in local NGOs, schools, health and social services. Especially social workers can point out which groups have increasing support demand and can intervene early on.
- The focus should be on the **most vulnerable groups**, such as single parents, Roma/travellers, migrants, families already in contact with social services or long-term unemployed. Geographical areas experiencing disadvantages should receive particular attention.

Working with stakeholders to set priorities

- **Stakeholders** (local authorities, NGOs, national advisory bodies, schools, social workers) can provide feedback on programming, designing actions and implementation. A consultation with academics and experts at the local level can provide valuable input.

Designing actions

- Designing actions for tackling Child Poverty funded in the context of the ESF+ as part of a wider **comprehensive strategy and/ or policies** at the national level contributes to the effectiveness and sustainability of the initiatives. It is important to develop an **integrated and person-centred approach** focussing on the needs of each child and addressing all the different aspects related to Child Poverty, involving local actors in a partnership approach. Integrated approaches are also a key success factor in municipal strategies to reduce Child Poverty.
- Actions should be designed to ensure the **sustainability** and continuity of positive outcomes, also after the ESF funding ends. To foster innovative and effective solutions, grant funding and sufficient project duration (at least two years), as well as flexibility in the access to funding are crucial.

- The end beneficiaries (families and children) should be directly involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of the actions, in the framework of a **co-creation** approach.

Challenges and lessons learnt

- **Challenges and lessons learnt** related to implementation from the previous programming period are extremely relevant to identify what worked and what did not and why. For instance, participants pointed out that implementing a comprehensive deinstitutionalisation approach can be challenging, as well as combining different funds, including EU funds.
- Capacity building and skills training of **professionals** working with vulnerable children and families should be further adapted to a context of deinstitutionalisation and development of home care and community-based care services.