

Social Innovation Plus – Competence Centres (SI Plus) Thematic network meeting: ESF+ Administration (hybrid)

11 October 2022, hybrid meeting

Draft Minutes

Welcome & introduction

On 11th October 2022, the first thematic network meeting took place focused on the ESF+ administration associated with programming, which is covered by the Slovak partner Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family (MoLSAF SR) within the consortium. During the meeting, planned activities to support social innovation were presented within the programs prepared for the next programming period 2021-2027 in individual countries, and at the end of the program, the future of national competence centres was discussed in the context of the link to the programming of ESF+ financial resources.

The meeting was opened by Monika Jakubecová and Matúš Tluščák from MoLSAF SR with the aim of welcoming all the meeting participants and introducing them the goals of the creation of this thematic network, which are mainly to find out the current state of ESF+ programming in individual countries, the method of allocating funds to support social innovations, as well as the vision of joint cooperation in the future when preparing calls or setting up the evaluation process. Challenges which may affect the implementation of projects, as well as the drawing of EU funds will be also addressed during the next thematic network meetings. At the Austrian-Slovak twinning meeting was opened discussion about application of state aid, which can be further developed with the participation of the other project partners and European Commission representatives.

Presentation of the ESF+ support of Social Innovations in individual countries

The opening speech was followed by a presentation of the Social Innovations and Experiments priority of the Programme Slovakia, which will be implemented in the programming period 2021-2027 and which was designed in close cooperation with important actors operating in this area outside the Ministry. Individual types of activities were presented to the participants of the meeting that will be supported as part of a dedicated priority aimed at supporting the innovation ecosystem in the regions, but also at supporting specific social innovations in various stages of their development of the innovation cycle together with the relevant measurable indicators and allocations.

Another country that presented planned support for social innovations was Austria. Within the framework of the ESF+ and JTF program brought closer the focus of the individual priority axes and subsequently also a special priority axis dedicated to the support of social innovations, which they plan to focus mainly on the environment of lifelong learning and active inclusion. Subsequently, they presented the intended process of announcing calls and the evaluation process with the involvement of intermediary bodies and the National Competence Centre for Social Innovations. They consider the biggest risks to be a low allocation, which, however, requires a lot of effort with implementation, the risk of assessing the innovativeness of projects by auditors, and questions related to the possibility of project failure.

The position of the National Competence Centre for Social Innovations in the process of implementing a separate priority supporting social innovations is seen mainly as a contact point for all Austrian ESF stakeholders, a provider of support services for intermediary bodies, as well as responsible for developing a catalogue of criteria, organizing mutual learning and supporting expansion and raising awareness of the concept of social innovation.

Another presenting partner was Bulgaria, which presented a separate priority aimed at supporting social innovations within the Human Resources Development Program for the next programming period 2021-2027. Within this priority, they set two specific goals aimed at supporting entry into the labour market, the ALMA initiative and improving access to quality services, through which they will support specific social innovations, i.e. the process of their development, testing and verification of innovative models, products and services. They also mentioned specific target groups for each area.

The last presenting partner of the project was Hungary, which presented 4 priorities of the Economic Development and Innovation Plus Programme, through which support for social innovations is possible, especially in the area of business development, sustainable labour market, youth guarantee and education. Through the Human Resources Development Programme plus, they allocated a separate priority no. 8, which is called the Emerging Settlements Program and which will enable the support of social innovations in the least developed settlements in the southern and northern parts of Hungary. The Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta is responsible for coordinating priority activities and using allocated funds to support new approaches to disadvantaged target groups, especially by philanthropic and church organizations. In particular, the development of health and preventive services, as well as access to them, as well as early intervention activities that prevent early leaving school facilities will be supported. At the end of the presentation, they presented measurable indicators as well as total allocations.

Future role of the National competence centres in ESF+ Social Innovation Support

A short break was followed by a discussion about the future of the competence centres, with the individual countries wanting to continue the already started activities at the national level even after the end of the project, and will allocate funds for this from the prepared programmes for the next programming period or from the state budget. Subsequently, they discussed the future activities of the European Competence Centre for Social Innovation under the leadership of the Lithuanian agency ESFA, which will connect individual national competence centres at the transnational level.