

Social Innovation Plus – Competence Centres (SI Plus)

Twinning meeting in Bratislava

Wednesday, 08 February 2023, Minutes

Second bilateral meeting was held in Bratislava at the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic (MoLSAF SR) within the twinning activity of the Austria and Slovakia under the SI PLUS project. The meeting was attended by the representative of the Austrian Managing Body for the European Social Fund (ESF MA), Stefanie Niemann, together with the representatives of L&R Social Research Barbara Willsberger (online) and Jörg Mirtl and the managers Christoph Schreiner and Waltraud Schober from the WIENWORK organization. On behalf of Slovakia, representatives of the MoLSAF SR Monika Jakubecová, Matúš Tluščák and Jana Žiškova (online) took part in the meeting.

The meeting was opened by Monika Jakubecová and Matúš Tluščák in order to welcome all participants and introduce them program of the meeting, as well as a summary of the first twinning meeting, which took place in September 2022 in Vienna.

Matúš Tluščák started the joint discussion by presenting the future approval process of applications proposed within the dedicated priority of Social Innovations and Experiments of the Programme Slovakia (PSK). In the programming period 2021-2027, the MoLSAF SR plans to ensure a more individual approach to applicants within the framework of social innovation support and at the same time a multi-round expert evaluation, which should bring less administrative burdens. Stefanie Niemann from the Austrian ESF MA clarified that the process of applications focused on social innovations is currently in the preparation and extensive discussions phase on their side. Barbara Willsberger added that calls aimed at supporting social innovation will be announced in Austria at the level of the Intermediate Bodies (IB), which are the regional governments in Austria. The evaluation and approval will be in the hand of these IBs. The calls will be organized via an online-database, called IDEA.

The discussion continued about the measurement of the impact of social innovation projects. Monika Jakubecová emphasized the importance of obtaining relevant outputs from social innovation projects for their future possible use within public administration services. The most suitable way how to measure the impact of social innovations seems to be that the applicants themselves will choose the tools and indicators through which they will monitor the impact of their projects. However, it needs to be considered, if the applicants will be able to set the impact measurement themselves or for which calls it will be appropriate to apply this condition. In order to help applicants with this process, the MoLSAF SR within the National Competence Center for Social Innovations (NCCSI) has been developing a guideline in which the process of setting up the impact measurement will be described in a simple form, i.e. from

the initial selection of a suitable tool, through the determination of evaluation questions to the selection of relevant indicators. Within this guideline, examples from the field of employment, education and active inclusion will be described in accordance with the areas of support for specific social innovations in PSK, on which the monitoring process will be explained. Other options to support applicants in the process of setting up the impact assessment of their projects is to finance an expert within their project who would help them with the whole process or to organize a series of workshops on this topic. The participants of the meeting agreed that this process can be a burden for the beneficiaries and it is difficult to implement it, especially considering the limited number of experts (external evaluators) and their limited capacities, which Jana Žižková also confirmed in a specific case from her own experience. But it is also right time to start building capacities and teaching applicants how to measure the impacts of their projects. Barbara Willsberger for the Austrian side explained that they are currently still preparing criteria according which future projects will be considered as innovative in the 2021-2027 programming period. She also clarified that they do not plan to measure the impact of these projects, although they will monitor the success of the projects, which will also be evaluated through a series of criteria. They consider to prepare a "universal questionnaire" for project participants, through which it would be possible to map, whether and what impact participation in the project had for the participant, whether his/her life situation changed as a result. In this way, it is possible to at least partially determine the direct impact of the projects.

At the end of the discussion within this agenda point, participants agreed to exchange prepared documents, i.e. guideline for setting up project impact measurement and criteria for the selection process of social innovation projects.

A short break was followed by a discussion on the structure of future national competence centers for social innovation. Monika Jakubecová explained that the MoLSAF SR plans to continue developing this project in the future, even if the structure of the NCCSI could be changed. Future NCCSI should consist of two main components, one is the Secretariat, which will be covering the project management, as well as an expert group which helps to set up the support for social innovations even now. The other component is the Advisory Committee which should be created of relevant experts and will supervise the activities of the Secretariat, as well as help with the preparation of calls supporting the field of social innovations from ESF+ funds within the PSK. The structure of the Austrian NCCSI should remain unchanged, and there will be a call from the ESF+ for the future support of this project at the national level. At the end of the discussion, the need for NCCSI was emphasized in the next phase of programming, which will be the support of social innovations, while the support from the European Competence Center for Social Innovation, which, in addition to the development of transnational cooperation, also announces a certain form of capacity building, remains questionable.

The last point of the joint discussion was the comparison of the structure of the joint blue print strategy for the support of social innovations at the national level from ESF+. Matúš Tluščák, on behalf of the MoLSAF SR, explained the individual parts of the prepared document "System of support for social innovations until 2030 in Slovakia", emphasizing that it will not concern the national context, but only support from ESF+ because of the capacity reasons and that this document also follows the National Strategy for the Science, Research and Innovation prepared by the Government Office of the Slovak Republic, in which NCCSI and its performance is one of the planned measures. The representatives of the Austrian partner added that the structure of their strategy proposal will also include the system of support for the social innovations from the ESF+, as well as the position of NCCSI in this system.

After lunch, all participants moved to the social enterprise KakawCo+ shop, as cooperation between this project and the Austrian organization WIENWORK was initiated within the framework of the thematic network "Sustainable Development" of the SI PLUS project. In the store, the owner Martina Matejíčková presented the whole concept again, explaining that they plan to expand their activities to the Austrian market. At the same time, she pointed out that they lack larger partners in the concept of employment support, who would be able to employ disadvantaged persons after their integration within the KakawCo+ project. Christoph Schreiner from the WIENWORK organization noted that they have lots of experience in this area and could share the know-how to connect with larger employers. In addition, he is also considering the possibility of using KakawCo+ as a cocoa supplier for restaurants and catering establishments that operate as social enterprises within their WIENWORK concept. The end of the meeting was completed by tasting different types of cocoa hot drinks and exchanging contacts between the cooperating organizations in order to agree on the next steps.

