



EU Structural Funds

The demands of the European Disability Forum

In July 2004, the European Commission adopted its legislative proposals on cohesion policy reform. **336.1 billion EUR** will be allocated (approximately one third of the Community budget) to develop structural actions. The objective is to reduce the differences between regions and create a better economic and social balance within and between Member States.

Some policy background

(source: EAPN newsletter –Nr 108/2004)

The new regulations will govern how structural assistance is delivered for the seven year period 2007-2013. There is one lengthy general regulation, followed by short, specialised regulations.

Five new regulations

1. The general regulation:

The main regulation is lengthy, following the trend of concentrating the main details in one instrument, with shorter flanking instruments addressing the specificities of the individual funds.

The future generation of programmes will be grouped under three headings:

Convergence (Objective 1 – 78.54% of funds): This objective primarily concerns the less developed Member States and regions, whose per capita GDP is less than 75% of the Community average. The Commission also proposes that temporary support should apply under this priority to those regions where per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) would have been below 75% of the Community average, as calculated for the Union of 15 Member States.

Regional competitiveness and employment (Objective 2 – 17.22%): For cohesion policy outside the least developed Member States and regions, the Commission proposes a two-fold approach: first, through regional programmes financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), cohesion policy will help regions to anticipate and promote economic change

in industrial, urban and rural areas by strengthening their competitiveness and attractiveness; second, through programmes financed by the European Social Fund (ESF), cohesion policy will help people to anticipate and to adapt to economic change, in line with the policy priorities of the European Employment Strategy, by supporting policies aiming at full employment, quality and productivity at work, and social inclusion.

European territorial cooperation (Objective 3 – 3.94%): Building on the experience of the present INTERREG Initiative, the Commission proposes to create a new objective dedicated to further the harmonious and balanced integration of the territory of the European Union by supporting cross-border co-operation. Under the new regulation, each Member State will prepare a 'national reference document', negotiated with the Commission that will be the framework for the operational programmes. Each operational programme must specify the monitoring and evaluation systems to be set down, including the composition of the monitoring committee.

The Structural Funds shall indeed operate under the partnership principle. Partnership is defined as being between the government and the partners it designates, including "any other appropriate body representing civil society, environmental partners, NGOs and bodies responsible for promoting equality between men and women".

2. The European Social Fund regulation (ESF):

Social inclusion is mentioned as a specific objective of the European Social Fund. The fund will be used to support the European Employment Strategy, including its objectives of reinforcing social inclusion and combating discrimination. The regulation is still focused on the labour market, employment and unemployment and refers several times to women and also to the social integration of migrants.

3. European Regional Development Fund regulation (ERDF):

The main objective of this Fund is to contribute to the reinforcement of economic, social and territorial cohesion. The use of ERDF funding may contribute to promoting the integration of cross-border labour markets, local employment initiatives, equal opportunities, training and social inclusion. The regulation also addresses the urban dimension to the ERDF that shall be used for participative, integrated strategies to tackle the high concentration of economic, environmental and social problems affecting urban agglomerations.

4. The Cohesion Fund and cross-border regulation:

The Cohesion Fund is for the benefit of the new Member States, Greece, Portugal and Spain. It sets down the availability of the funds for transport and

environmental projects. No specific provision is made for a monitoring committee.

5. Rural regulation:

Finally, there is a rural regulation for the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), which reflects the reforms currently taking place in Community agriculture and rural development policy. The regulation states very clearly that the principles of the LEADER programme must be continued into the new fund. The regulation also establishes a European network for rural development.

In addition, each Member State is required to establish a national rural development network. As is the case with the general regulation, there is provision for a monitoring committee along the lines of social partnership.

No proposals have been put forward to take account of the ending of the EQUAL programme, while the other Community Initiative Programmes INTERREG, URBAN and LEADER have been clearly and visibly mainstreamed.

What is the European Disability Forum campaigning for?

Disappointingly disabled persons were not recognised in the main elements of the Structural Funds 2000-2006: the General Regulation, the Cohesion Fund or the European Regional Development Fund. Disability was only given some recognition in the European Social Fund. This is not sufficient to ensure accessibility and non-discrimination is recognised in the EU funded regional development and operational programmes of the Member States.

In the process of simplifying the current system and clarifying the role of the different instruments, **the European Disability Forum is campaigning for:**

- ✓ the interests of disabled persons to be given much greater recognition and for disability issues to be mainstreamed across all the Structural Funds objectives and key themes of the programme, an approach which is crucial to ensure that disabled people do not continue to be marginalized and excluded from society;
- ✓ for the design of the programmes to be full accessible to disabled participants;
- ✓ Funding must be available to allow for any additional costs incurred by disabled persons to guarantee their full and equal involvement;
- ✓ **The General Regulation:** There should also be a specific Article on mainstreaming non-discrimination and disability and accessibility for

disabled persons. This is important for non-discrimination and accessibility for disabled people to be recognised among the criteria for allocation of funds across the key funding programmes (*as it is already the case for gender equality: Article 14 on gender equality in the General Regulation*).

- ✓ Funding must be available to allow for any additional costs incurred by disabled persons to guarantee their full and equal involvement in all aspects of the Funding Programmes

- ✓ **The European Regional Development Fund** : Call for there to be mandatory conditions on accessibility attached to funding which concerns built environment, transport (e.g. extending and upgrading basic infrastructures); support for information communication technologies and support for research and development projects;

- ✓ **The European Social Fund**: EDF calls for the principle and practice of non-discrimination to be made an overarching issue in the European Social Fund programme and across the Structural Fund programmes in general.

- ✓ Accessibility must also be recognised among the criteria for the funding of European Social Fund projects.