

Capacity Building of Social Partners and the European Social Fund Draft Recommendations of the European Social Partners

1. Ensuring the respect of the partnership principle and realising the full added value of the involvement of social partners in ESF implementation

- The European Commission, Member States and Managing authorities should ensure a clearly defined role and status for social partner organisations in the context of ESF implementation, as part of a renewed code of conduct on Partnership;
- The managing authorities, European Commission and social partners should hold a discussion in the ESF Committee to explore ways in which to renew the European Code of Conduct on Partnership, taking into account social partners' needs at national, regional and sectoral levels. Topics that could be explored during this discussion include:
 - a. developing an approach whereby all national members of the European cross-industry social partner organisations are involved in helping to shape the priorities of the partnership agreements and in the preparation of operational programmes and are invited to participate in monitoring committees, as appropriate;
 - b. providing social partner members of Monitoring Committees with training, expert input and advice and guidance, as necessary.
 - c. developing a mechanism for monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the Code by the Member States;
 - d. publishing the list of all Members of ESF operational programme monitoring committees on the website of the European Structural and Investment Funds;
 - e. making adherence with the principles of the Code of Conduct an ex-ante conditionality.

2. Assessing social partners' capacity building needs to allow for a tripartite decision at national level on the allocation of ESF resources to social partners

This should be done in the spirit of the quadri-partite statement on the new start of the social dialogue, and taking into account the opinion of the ESF Committee on the future of the Fund.

- The social partners should identify their concrete needs for capacity building support and the role the ESF can play in helping to strengthen social dialogue, including to support better implementation of the outcomes of the European social dialogue;
- The managing authorities should put in place transparent procedures (decision on allocation of ESF resources available nationally dedicated to social partners' capacity building, planning of funding priorities, ex-ante evaluation and operational programming, calls for proposals, monitoring and evaluation);
- The European Commission and managing authorities should provide guidance and technical assistance to social partners in the Member States, sharing good practices, country cases, and fostering mutual learning.

3. Focusing ESF support on projects improving the functioning and fairness of labour markets as foreseen in the European Pillar of Social Rights, in line with the reform priorities agreed in the European semester, taking account of the findings of employment and social policy benchmarking

- Given the crucial role that social partners play regarding labour market aspects, the EU Commission should ensure that EU and national social partners can apply to fund projects that contribute to improve employment prospects.

4. Improving the overall ESF architecture to facilitate the planning and execution of ESF activities for managing authorities and social partners

- Managing authorities, supported by the European Commission, and in consultation with social partners should consider how to overcome the challenges of project-based funding.
- The European Commission should explore the possibility of setting up programming arrangements for social partner capacity building initiatives throughout an entire funding period (instead of individual project-based calls, including the possibility for a performance reserve inspired from the European regional development fund - ERDF).
- Managing authorities, supported by the European Commission, should work towards the introduction of the recommendations of the High-Level Group on simplification to deliver a more effective and efficient implementation of ESF activities, notably as concerns simplified cost options.
- Managing authorities should consider how to further provide social partner members of Monitoring Committees with training, expert input and advice and guidance.