



EUROPEAN UNION
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European Social Fund

PMC Meeting 29 September 2020

Agenda Item 9: Communications Update

The ESF MA seeks the opinion of the PMC on the Information and Communication activities and measures for 2020.

Covid-19

From 12 March the Government made the decision to close all educational institutions and recommended that employees work from home where possible. In follow up measures, the Government urged citizens to stay at home wherever possible. Due to the covid-19 pandemic all physical events for the foreseeable future have been postponed.

Major Activities:

AONTAS STAR Awards

The STAR Awards (Showcasing Teamwork, Awarding Recognition) celebrates the positive contribution that adult learning initiatives make to adult learners, local communities and wider society. The ESF once again sponsored a Special Recognition Award for ESF co-funded projects and attended the awards ceremony on 2 March 2020. The Awards were a unique opportunity for ESF to gain nationwide visibility and presence with a wide ranging audience of learners, communities, organisations and the media. Eight ESF co-funded projects were shortlisted for an award. These projects were:

Category	Project	ESF Activity
Social Inclusion	DCU Ability	Disability Project
Social Inclusion	Bedford Row Traveller DRIVE Initiative	Adult Literacy
Social Inclusion	The Dillion's Cross Project	BTEI
Sustainable Employment	The EPIC Programme	Integration and Employment of Migrants
Sustainable Employment	Ballyhoura Development Ability Programme	Disability Project
Sustainable Employment	Ability@Work Cork	Disability Project
Sustainable Employment	Healthcare Opportunities for Women	Gender Equality
Sustainable Employment	Vocational Training Programme	BTEI

STAR Award Winners – ESF Co-funded Projects

- Sustainable Employment (Large Organisation): **Ability@Work Cork**.

- Social Inclusion (Large Organisation): **The Bedford Row Traveller DRIVE Initiative.**
- Social Inclusion (Small & Medium Organisation): **The Dillon's Cross Project.**
- Special Recognition Award: **Healthcare Opportunities for Women.**

Public Consultation

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Department of Education and Skills, together with the three Regional Assemblies launched a public consultation process to inform the selection of priorities for the use of European cohesion funding for 2021-2027.

The ESF MA worked with the Northern and Western Regional assembly to develop a communications strategy for the consultation. The communication activities included the development of a dedicated consultation website and a targeted social media campaign which included stories from the current round.

The main aim of the consultation communication strategy is to increase public awareness, transparency and visibility of the consultation.

The key objectives of the strategy are to:

- Identify the most effective methods and structures through which to disseminate information, and to ensure accessible, transparent and appropriate consultation;
- Ensure that the public and stakeholders have an opportunity to shape cohesion policy in Ireland;
- Disseminate the consultation survey as widely as possible;
- Encourage high levels of attendance at the consultation engagement event(s);
- Generate high-quality consultation feedback that can be used to inform the decision-making process for the 2021-2027 round of funding;

AONTAS FET Learner Forum

The Further Education and Training (FET) Learner Forum is a large-scale project designed to ensure FET is actively engaging learner voice and creating policy that is responsive to learner needs. The project consists of one national event and a series of 16 regional events held at Education and Training Boards across Ireland each year. At each event, learners from across the FET sector are asked to share their experience in FET and offer recommendations on how to improve services.

The Regional and National FET Learner events have been postponed until the autumn. The MA have given a commitment to support these events in line with Government guidance.

Europe in My Region 2020

The European Commission's 'Europe in My Region' campaign aims to highlight the work that projects across Europe are doing with the help of EU funding.

On 2nd February, the ESF MA wrote to ESF bodies to provide details about the 2020 campaign and to request information about any events including open days, information days, awards ceremonies or launches that could be included on the interactive map for the campaign on the Commission's website. On 11th March the Commission gave a recommendation to postpone all local events that might lead to a spread of Covid-19.

Many of the ESF project have held online events and there are over 40 events on the Commission's map with another 30 to be added. We also continue to encourage the use of the hashtag **#EUinmyRegion** when using social media to promote ESF co-funded projects.

The Commission has also organised other communication activities for this year's campaign including:

- Free customised promotional postcards.
- A story telling competition.
- A quiz/online game.

Events

As set out in the ESF Information and Communication Event Policy, the ESF MA endeavours to support ESF related events. Attendance by the ESF MA at events is determined by staff availability and is dependent on the current priorities of the ESF & EGF Policy and Operations Unit. In general the ESF MA will prioritise events that have a national or regional reach but may attend more localised events where appropriate. The Covid-19 restrictions have prevented physical attendance at events since March 2020.

The ESF are liaising with the 16 ETBs regarding their Further Education & Training (FET) fairs. The MA plan to support the ETBs in any way they can considering the current Government guidance.

The MA was due to exhibit at European Maritime Day (EMD) on 14-15 May in Cork City, this has now been postponed until later in the year. The MA was also due to exhibit at Seafest for the first time, from 15-17 May. Seafest has been cancelled and will return in 2021.

Also this year, the ESF and ERDF MA's, in conjunction with the Member State (DPER), were due to have a stand in the European Commission Representation in Ireland's marquee at the National Ploughing Championships (15-17 September, Co. Carlow). This event has been cancelled until 2021.

List of Operations

In accordance with Article 115(2) and Annex XII of the Common Provisions Regulation 1303/2013 (CPR) the ESF MA continues to maintain a List of Operations on its website. This list was last updated in June 2020.

The Commission has developed the Kohesio project and Ireland has been included in the pilot phase. Kohesio is a knowledge-base which gathers and links all the project-related data and information for the current funding period (2014-2020). It offers user-friendly navigation and efficient search, throughout all projects funded by cohesion policy in 2014-2020, namely the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund, as well as information related to the beneficiaries of these EU funds.

The ESF Managing Authority will be working with DG Regio and the Kohesio project team to test, manage data and communicate Kohesio.

ESF Newsletter and Calendar

Each year the ESF MA produces a newsletter and a calendar to promote the work of Operations that are co-funded by the ESF/YEI. The newsletter and calendar offer a wide audience an insight in to how the ESF is investing in people in Ireland and the work that takes place at project level. The ESF MA has contacted IBs, Beneficiaries and Project Implementers requesting material for inclusion, including their experience of operating during the Covid-19 pandemic and the experience of the learners. The MA are working on a newsletter that will be published and promoted online.

ESF Merchandise

Due to the covid-19 pandemic the ESF MA have postponed the procurement of any promotional material until restrictions are lifted.

ESF Website and Twitter

The ESF MA continues its work on updating and developing the ESF website, www.esf.ie. This work includes reviewing and updating existing content, translation and ensuring the website is in line with accessibility requirements.

The ESF MA continues to actively manage the @ESF_Ireland Twitter account and to promote it as widely as possible. The ESF in Ireland is now on Facebook, you can follow us here: <https://www.facebook.com/EuropeanSocialFundIreland>.

Coordination

The ESF MA will continue to actively participate in INIO meetings and National ESIF Communications Committee meetings and to explore the potential for co-ordination/collaboration, where possible.

Public Awareness Survey

The ESIF Communications Committee gave a commitment to undertake a Public Awareness and Attitudes survey in 2020. The procurement process for the Public Awareness Survey was conducted within an OGP framework and is now complete. There were two submissions received; Red C and Behaviour and Attitudes Research.

Red C failed to reach the minimum qualifying threshold in Criteria A2. Approach and Methodology to Service Delivery and A4 Quality, Relevant Experience and Availability of Resources of Proposed Team, as such they were eliminated and the committee recommended that the contract be awarded to Behaviour and Attitudes, as they were deemed to be the Most Economically Advantageous Tender.

The contract has been signed and the inception meeting has taken place. We expect the final report and recommendations in November. The recommendations will be considered when developing the communications strategy post 2020.

Compliance

The ESF MA have recently issued letters to the relevant projects regarding all outstanding issues relating to the website compliance checks. The response has been very positive.

Support Role

The ESF MA is available to provide support, guidance and training to ESF bodies and will continue to inform on any changes to ESF information and communication requirements.