



# ESI Funds for Health Final Conference Report

6-7 December, 2018



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# Summary of the ESI Funds for Health Final Conference

6 December 2018

The conference was preceded by the annual conference of EUREGHA, which took place in the same venue during the morning and focused on discussing policies, skills and investments needed and the particular role of regions in delivering good quality healthcare. The ESI Funds for Health conference started with a networking lunch bridging the two events.

During the afternoon of 6 December, Clive Needle, Senior Policy Advisor, EuroHealthNet moderated the presentations and discussions.

## Opening session

The opening session included a speech by Andrzej Rys, Director, DG Health and Food Safety, who provided context for the work that DG SANTE is carrying out to support a more effective implementation of the ESI Funds in health and other related areas. Next, Lorenza Badiello, Director of Emilia Romagna Region Delegation to the EU welcomed all participants to the venue and introduced the approach that the Emilia Romagna region is taking for the use of ESI Funds, including its smart specialisation strategy and the collaboration with the health cluster of the region.

## Session ESI Funds for Health: contributions to health policies

Working together for health: policy objectives and tools at the EU level

Mr. Sylvain Giraud, DG SANTE, European Commission talked about cooperation at the EU level in the health field. In his presentation, Mr. Giraud talked about the common challenges and shared values of EU member states. He also covered the existing policy framework and the main policy objectives contained in main communications and documents with a special reference to the 'State of the Health at the EU'. Mr. Giraud introduced the discussion about the ESI Funds for Health project in the context of DG SANTE's role in this area especially as a knowledge broker.

ESI Funds for Health 2014–2020: main success factors and lessons learned

Rosa Castro project manager of the ESI Funds for Health (Milieu Ltd), presented the main findings of the project. After providing a short overview of the timeline and objectives of the project, she reminded the audience that the key messages of her presentation were the result of a combination of different methods:

- desk research to map all the health-related investments funded by ESI Funds across EU Member States and in the three European Regional Cooperation (Interreg programmes);
- more in-depth study about a group of 63 exemplary projects identified through the application of multiple criteria; and
- wide discussions with different stakeholders involved in the use of the ESI Funds during the 6 workshops organised by the project.

After providing some basic figures about the 7,404 projects found during the ESI Funds for health study, the presentation focused on explaining how health is addressed by the funds during the current

programming period (2014-2020). Given the cross-cutting nature of health, direct health investments are possible under at least 7 of the 11 thematic objectives. Although none of these thematic objectives focuses on health, several of them are further developed in the Investment Priorities applicable to each specific fund (i.e. ESF and ERDF for health investments) and health is addressed in some of these Investment Priorities.

The last part of this presentation focused on 4 key messages and recommendations contained in the final publication that was distributed during the event. These messages are:

- Cross-sector cooperation is key for the development of integrated solutions to address health challenges. Health is a cross sectoral area with multiple links to other sectors such as social services, employment, education, research, etc. However, because the investment priorities and objectives for ESI Funds are organized by sector, the risk exists that if a ‘silo’ mentality prevails, funds will be dedicated to single sectors or mainly used by one institution (a Ministry of Finance, labour, etc), potentially losing the value of inter-sectoral collaboration. Instead, working together with other sectors is key to have meaningful health outcomes. Health produces gains for other sectors; investments in other sectors can also address the socio-economic determinants of health (e.g. education, employment, social inclusion). For instance, an effort to address complex risk factors such as alcohol consumption, can be more successful if tackled by a cross-sectoral programme that addresses health as well as employment aspects. We found that the development of cross-sectoral networks are key for the success of many ESI Funded projects. Either building on existing networks can facilitate the success of projects, or the added-value of ESI Funds can be precisely to support new cooperation with different actors and the adoption of more holistic approaches to solving public health problems. Regional and local projects tend to more easily build such cross-sectoral networks as collaboration is facilitated by institutions being closer to each other and fewer in number. In the next MFF, from 11 different thematic objectives, the proposal presents 5 policy objectives, these could, this could facilitate more cross-sectoral collaboration. Also, the inclusion of the EU Health programme with the expanded ESF+ programme should also foster more collaboration between different sectors.
- Strong institutions are needed. Institutional capacity is a critical pre-condition for the effective use of the funds and their meaningful outcomes. Ideally, ESI Funds should support structural reforms: for instance, many Member States are working to shift from institutionalized to more community-based healthcare and this is in line with strategic policy objectives and best evidence in health policy and also with the European Semester cycle of broader institutional reform. ESI Funds can support such broad reforms, but for this to happen, strong institutions are key for working together to create a climate of reform that can reinforce the development of ESI Funds Operational Programmes (OPs) and projects. One challenge for the implementation of broad structural reforms with ESI Funds, is the project-based nature of the funds. For instance, projects that support the health workforce need long-term planning to collect and analyse data about health workers, however, this is the long-term work of institutions. Without careful planning of future needs, the impact of projects might be limited. On the other hand, the project-based nature of ESI funds offers advantages such as the need to develop projects with clear objectives, activities, outcomes and timeline. This allows authorities to monitor how the money is spent. In the next MFF, the proposals include stronger links between the Funds and the European semester, along with a reinforced tool for capacity building for structural reforms. Stronger capacity and technical expertise is needed, as it is better communication of health priorities to other policy areas, development of good indicators and project development and management skills.
- Investment in people is crucial for the health sector. Many broad reforms (such as deinstitutionalization) advocate for a shift from investments in infrastructure towards more ‘soft’ types of investments (for instance to train people and to promote community services, health promotion and prevention of diseases. Similarly, we have found a move away from ESI Funds during this 2014-2020 period away from investment in infrastructure and towards softer types of

investments. Many of the projects we mapped were supporting human resources, linking health to other sectors such as social services, and raising awareness about important health risks factors. However, stakeholders noted that authorities sometimes continue to express a preference for large capital expenditure projects due to their high political profile. While investments in large infrastructure are essential to address structural challenges including regional development needs, population changes and ageing infrastructure, it is also important that these types of projects do not crowd out soft investments. ESI Funds should lead the way in prioritizing both types of hard and soft investments also through the ability to blend different funding streams, which is key to the success of projects. With the next period probably emphasizing the link between the European Semester and structural reform, (monitoring the use of ESI Funds to address CRSs and using this info to guide mid-term review of programs), it would be important to balance hard and soft investments

- More coordination to fully understand existing projects and identify opportunities is needed. The opportunity to learn from each other, network and be inspired by projects and people addressing similar challenges across the EU was appreciated by stakeholders. Better dissemination of ESI Funded projects and other initiatives could help. Many stakeholders were interested in the database of projects, to find out about similar projects in other MS: for instance, projects addressing the needs of the health workforce with ESI Funds might benefit from other projects such as the Joint Action on HWF planning and forecasting and the current network SEPEN; the health promotion best practices portal is another key tool. Network initiatives can contribute to building capacities of authorities and institutions responsible of reform, maximizing the outcomes of funds.

A few questions asked during the discussions focused on the scope of the mapping exercise. It was explained that the main purpose of this exercise was to map existing investments made possible with ESI Funds in the health area rather than to attempt to measure the impact that the use of ESI Funds is having on health outcomes. However, the issue of indicators and studies being an essential piece of information needed in this area was also discussed.

Other questions from the audience were related to next steps after this study. An invitation was made to all stakeholders to review the outputs of the project (mapping documents, country factsheets and factsheets with information about the projects). Participants were also invited to contact the project team and DG SANTE with further suggestions or comments about these outputs and ideas for future projects supporting the use of ESI Funds in the health area.

## ESI Funded projects 2014-2020: panel with project coordinators

In this session, the audience heard about the experience of 4 different project coordinators that have been implementing projects supported by ESI Funds. The four projects presented in this session were:

- Proximity Healthcare Units project, Algarve region, Portugal
- ConSENSo project, Piedmont region, Italy
- Mental Healthcare reform project, Czech Republic
- eMen project, Interreg (North-West Europe)

The aim of the session was to give a snapshot of a few of these projects and possibly inspire people from different sectors (health, employment, social services, regional development) for the next programming period. Information about these and other projects was discussed in more detail on the next day within the parallel sessions while this session focused on highlighting the variety of projects found during the mapping exercise

## Ministerial session hosted by EU Commissioner Vytenis Andriukaitis

EU Commissioner Vytenis Andriukaitis opened this session by providing his view about health inequalities, socio-economic determinants of health, the national transformation of health systems, and the implications of these challenges for the use of ESI Funds to support health investments.

After this speech, the panellists addressed the audience:

- Riina Sikkut, Minister of Health and Labour, Estonia
- Sorina Pintea, Minister of Health, Romania
- Andrey Kovatchev, Member of the European Parliament
- Tomislav Dulibić, State Secretary, Croatia
- Jenny Nacheva, Deputy Minister of Health, Bulgaria
- Liisa-Maria Voipio-Pulkki, Director-General, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Finland

In their interventions, the panellists highlighted their experience with using the ESI Funds to invest in health including in primary care, health promotion and disease prevention, and digitisation of health systems. The importance of ESI Funds to help healthcare systems address current challenges and prepare for the future was also emphasised by the panellists.

The panellists called for better integration of the Funds within a broader strategic planning for EU healthcare systems; for cross-sectoral collaboration to help deliver long-term reforms; for a good mix between investments of resources in modernising infrastructure but also for “softer” investments in health prevention; and for stressing the synergies and complementarities between ESI Funds and other EU funds to support healthcare, health in all policies with the help of innovation and digitisation.

The first day of the Conference ended with a networking cocktail.

7 December 2018

## Opening session

Lorenza Badiello, Director of Emilia Romagna Region Delegation to the EU, gave a short speech to welcome participants to the venue and introduced the point of view of the Emilia Romagna region and its interest in the discussions of the ESI Funds for health conference.

Next, Jennifer McGuinn, the Project Director of the ESI Funds for Health (Milieu Ltd) provided a short overview of the project and an overview of the day in terms of the parallel sessions and concluding session. Next, she explained to the audience where each parallel session would take place and invite participants to choose one out of the 2 parallel sessions and continue the discussions about the use of ESI Funds to support health investments.

## Parallel sessions I: access to healthcare & health promotion

### I. Investing to improve access to healthcare, 1st floor

- Dr Paolo Morgado, Proximity Healthcare Units project, Head, Algarve region, Portugal
- Paola Obbia, ConSENSo project, Piedmont region, Italy
- Maria Xenou, Community Centres project, Regional Unit of Achaia, Greece
- Damien Gruson, Proximity Labs Project, Belgium
- Rosa Castro, ESI Funds for Health Project Manager, Milieu Ltd
- Moderator: Dorota Sienkiewicz, Policy Coordinator, EuroHealthNet

This session focused on projects improving access to healthcare. Rosa Castro presented the main findings of the project for this theme, including the number of projects found, the budget spent, and the main messages and lessons learned from the discussion of this theme. Among these lessons were the importance that ESI Funds are having in complementing the health budgets of many Member States and regions and helping them address the challenges of health inequalities and limited access to healthcare. The need for better indicators to measure the outcomes of projects was also discussed.

This presentation was followed by presentations on 4 projects funded by ESI funds and that had participated in the workshop organised in Algarve: (1) the Proximity Healthcare units facilitating access to healthcare in rural areas of Algarve, Portugal; (2) the ConSENSo project funded within the Interreg Alpine programme and helping the elderly to receive high-quality care at home while providing training and support for community nurses; (3) the Community Centres project improving access to primary care and supporting the move towards community-centred care; and (4) the Proximity Labs Project using new technologies to support better access to diagnostic and monitoring tools for patients with chronic diseases.

Participants asked a few questions from the panellists, especially to clarify the scope of the activities that they were undertaking under the projects and the potential impact of these activities in improving access to healthcare.

### II. Investing in the future through prevention, ground floor

- Sanja Musić Milanović, Healthy Living project, Croatia

- Tadeja Hočevar, SOPA project, Slovenia
- Aleksandra Hapka, Green care farms project, Poland
- Agnieszka Markowska, ESI Funds for Health Expert, Milieu Ltd
- Moderator: Ingrid Stegeman, Programme Manager, EuroHealthNet

The panel session ‘Investing in the future through prevention’ focused on interventions in the field of health promotion, active and healthy ageing, and healthy workforce. Agnieszka Markowska introduced the topic giving a presentation about the ESI Funds for Health project findings related to this theme. This theme was the largest among the six main themes both regarding the number of projects and regarding their total budget. The highest numbers of projects were found in the sub-themes ‘Reintegration of disadvantaged people at the labour market’, ‘Early detection of diseases’, and ‘Life-long learning’. The main messages for this theme are that health promotion and disease prevention allow savings on curative costs, that these interventions often improve employability and counteract social isolation.

This introductory presentation was followed by three presentations based on experience from beneficiary projects: 1) Healthy Living from Croatia; 2) SOPA project on prevention of alcohol addiction from Slovenia and 3) Green Care Farms from Poland. The discussion focused specifically on the Healthy Living project, which takes a very comprehensive approach to health promotion and is a good example of cross-sectoral cooperation. Collaboration with stakeholders and having a clear long-term strategy for health promotion projects were found to be very important success factors underlying both the Healthy Living and the SOPA project. The Green Care Farms project, on the other hand, is a good example of a relatively small project which can be developed as a pattern for a larger programme of care for the elderly - there are plans to roll out this approach at a regional level in Poland. All the projects presented in this session underpin the importance of investing in soft measures. Such investments in the long term allow changing the attitudes of the society and lead to real societal changes and at the same time to savings for the economy.

## Parallel sessions II: research and innovation & health workforce

### III. Planning and building a stable and resilient health workforce, 1st floor

- Kristine Karsa, Latvian health workforce projects, Ministry of Health, Latvia
- Paolo Michelutti, National Agency for the regional Health Services, Italy
- Marieke Kroezen, Joint Action on Health Workforce Planning and Forecasting
- Mariya Gancheva, ESI Funds for Health Expert, Milieu Ltd
- Moderator: Jennifer McGuinn, ESI Funds for Health Project Director, Milieu Ltd

The parallel session ‘Planning and building a stable and resilient health workforce’ focused on interventions related to the health workforce. Mariya Gancheva introduced the topic giving a presentation about the ESI Funds for Health project findings related to this theme. This theme was among those with the smallest number of projects identified but with a fairly important share of the overall budget of ESI-funded health investments. After providing an overview of the types of projects and approaches identified, Ms Gancheva outlined the key messages and conclusions from the analysis. While many projects support the training and shortages needs that Member States face, there is limited support for interventions that take a longer-term, more strategic approach to assessing and planning the health workforce. This requires: complementing financial incentives with longer-term solutions and approaches; developing a good understanding of the underlying challenges and possible future developments in the health sector; building the capacities within relevant public health institutions to carry out strategic planning. Furthermore, the support from the ESI Funds can be improved by: stronger collaboration between health authorities and Managing Authorities, education intuitions and other relevant stakeholders; stronger synergies with other



health priorities and infrastructure investments; stronger synergies with other funding mechanisms or EU initiatives (e.g. JAHWF, SEPEN).

This introductory presentation was followed by three presentations that showcased the: experience from two beneficiary projects in Latvia; the findings of the JAHWF and its relevance for health workforce planning; the ongoing and future activities of the SEPEN and its relevance to building the capacities of health authorities. The discussion focused more specifically on the upcoming events of the SEPEN and how they are relevant for the past or ongoing work of other project beneficiaries, particularly in relation to inter-professional training for health and other relevant professionals (e.g. social workers). Furthermore, the importance of learning from the existing knowledge and expertise developed within initiatives such as the JAHWF and SEPEN was emphasised. Another key point of discussion was the need to blend different sources of funding such as the ESF and the ERDF and to establish complementary objectives across the funds to ensure that they jointly support common long term goals for the health sector.

#### IV. Fostering innovative solutions for healthcare, ground floor

- Giuseppe Carbone, AgeWell project, Romania
- Joanna Lane, Executive Director, Health ClusterNET
- Aki Ishiwa, Emilia Romagna region Delegation to the EU
- Rosa Castro, ESI Funds for Health Project Manager, Milieu Ltd
- Moderator: Sarah O'Brien, ESI Funds for Health Expert, Milieu Ltd

This session started with an introductory presentation by Rosa Castro, who explained the main findings of the project for this theme. Representing around 20% of the total, a variety of projects supporting the development of new products and processes; networks for collaboration between different sectors (private, public, academia and clinical research); and research infrastructures was identified during the mapping exercise of ESI Funded projects. The key messages emerging from this theme were the need to emphasise and enhance the potential synergies between different funds to support long and complex research activities in the health sector and the need to bridge project activities with broader policy goals, such as those reflected in strategic policy documents, including the smart specialisation strategies of countries and regions.

The next presentation discussed the AgeWell project in Romania, which is developing a research centre that uses robotics to support the rehabilitation of patients. The project highlights the potential use of ESI Funds to support the development of research centres also by attracting researchers. Another presentation focused on the experience of the Emilia Romagna region, which has been actively based on developing its smart specialisation strategy and collaborating with a wide group of stakeholders within the recently created health cluster. The final presentation discussed the challenges of research and innovation in the health area with a focus on those affecting the development of new products in this area; these challenges include the complex regulatory environment and the pre-conditions required for projects to be successful and achieve sustainability. The debate during this session focused on clarifying some of these pre-conditions needed for successful research and innovation projects and the possible areas in which ESI Funds could better support them. These preconditions include the necessary infrastructure, human and other resources needed to bridge innovation gaps between countries and regions to help them be ready to access other types of funds and therefore also ensure the sustainability of research projects.

### Parallel sessions III: e-health and reform of health systems

#### V. Future-proofing health systems, 1st floor

- Dita Protopopová, Mental Healthcare reform project, Ministry of Health, Czech Republic
- Kristine Karsa, Latvian health reform project, Ministry of Health, Latvia
- Sirkku Pikkujämsä, Popster project, Finland
- Sarah O'Brien, ESI Funds for Health Expert, Milieu Ltd
- Moderator: Caroline Costongs, Director, EuroHealthNet

The 'Future-proofing health systems' session focused on the use of ESI Funds to support health system reforms in the Member States. First, Sarah O'Brien, an expert in structural funds working on the ESI Funds for Health project team, presented the key findings of the project on health system reform. The presentation highlighted spending trends and key lessons relating to ESI Fund investments in health system reform.

Three ESI project representatives then presented their experiences of using ESI funds to support health system reforms. First, Dita Protopopova from the Czech Ministry of Health presented on the experience of using the European Social Fund to support deinstitutionalisation reforms of the mental health care system in the Czech Republic. Then Kristine Karsa of the Latvian Ministry of Health presented on the use of ESI Funds to for broad reforms of the Latvian health system, in response to a World Bank evaluation. Finally, Sirkku Pikkujämsä of the Region of Northern Ostrobothnia in Finland on the initiative there to prepare the region for the implementation on nation-wide health and social services reforms.

Discussions focused on various issues raised during the presentations. The importance of involving regional authorities in reforms was raised, to better balance reform planning (by central authorities) and implementation (by regional and local authorities). In discussions on the future focus of ESIF investments in health systems reform, integration of services and digitalisation were mentioned as possible areas of focus going forward. Ensuring the coordination of investments from ERDF and ESF to maximise the impact of reforms was also discussed, with one panellist noting the growing recognition in their country of the need to ensure alignment between these investments to ensure that infrastructure investments under ERDF are consistent with ESF spending, and policy goals more generally.

## VI. Investing in e-health to address future healthcare needs, ground floor

- Oyono Vlijter, eMen project, Interreg (North-West Europe)
- Maria Zafeiropoulou, T.O.M.Y. project, Patras, Greece
- István Csizmadia, e-health platform, Hungary
- Matthew Jones, ESI Funds for Health Deputy Project Manager, Milieu Ltd
- Moderator: Mariya Gancheva, ESI Funds for Health Expert, Milieu Ltd

This session started with a presentation by Matthew Jones, Deputy Manager of the ESI Funds for Health project, who gave an overview of the main findings and key messages emerging from the ESI Funded projects mapped and studied under this theme. While e-health projects only represented 3 % of the total number of projects, due to the large budget of some of these projects, they accounted for around 12% of the total spending. The variety of projects found reflect the different needs of countries and regions in terms of the digitalisation of their health systems, with some projects being used to set up e-health national or regional systems, and others supporting the development of specific applications or developing specific solutions for different health services.

The next presentations illustrated some of the types of projects identified within the mapping exercise of the ESI Funds for Health project: (1) the eMen project within the Interreg North-West Europe is supporting a collaboration between different partners for the development of specific solutions that support e-mental health; (2) the T.O.M.Y. project in Greece uses e-health to support a wide project providing access to

primary healthcare services for the population; (3) the e-health project in Hungary is setting up a comprehensive platform that will allow the provision of many different services with digital support (e.g. electronic health records, e-prescriptions, etc.). Given the differences between the 3 projects presented in this session, most of the questions during the debate focused on clarifying what each of the projects is doing and is expected to do in the future.

## Wrap up of the parallel sessions

Jennifer McGuinn, the Director the ESI Funds for Health project (Milieu Ltd) moderated a panel with 5 other moderators of the parallel sessions. Each moderator gave a brief overview based on the main discussions and messages emerging from each of the panels.

## Concluding session

### ESI Funds for Health: The way forward in the next MFF

Caroline Costongs, Director of EuroHealthNet, presented the analysis and recommendations developed by EuroHealthNet for the next MFF. In her presentation, she addressed the question of how can ESF+, ERDF and other EU financial instruments in 2021-2027 be better enabled to advance health and social inclusion and incorporated the importance of the European Pillar of Social Rights as well as the European Semester and guidance for the spending priorities.

### Closing remarks

- Wallis Goelen Vandebrock, Head of Unit, DG Regional and Urban Policy
- Katarina Ivankovic-Knezevic, Director, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion
- Sylvain Giraud, DG Health and Food Safety

In their closing remarks, the representatives of DG Regional and Urban Policy and DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion reflected on the impact of ESI Funds to support cross-cutting interventions across the Member States. Sylvain Giraud from DG Health and Food Safety gave a final speech to thank the audience and close the final conference for their participation and contributions to the debate on the use of ESI Funds to support health.



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