

EGI.eu Briefing Paper on EU Structural Funds

Do you know that there are unused Structural Funds for 2013 that could be accessed by your NGI? Do you want to know more about whom to contact and what is needed for your application? Are you exploring longer-term funding opportunities? Keep on reading to find answers to these questions.

Background

The EU Member States (MS) aim to “reduce disparities between the levels of development of the various regions and the backwardness of the least favoured regions” as stated in EU Treaties as main goal of Cohesion Policy (CP).¹ CP provides an adequate framework for financing a wide range of projects and investments to deal with these disparities while encouraging economic growth.

Within the current financial framework (2007-2013), the EU is spending an average of almost **€50 billion per year on CP**, which is **one third of the total EU budget and it is the second biggest item in the budget**. Structural Funds (SF) are one of the financial tools set up to implement the CP by the EC.

Europe 2020 is the growth strategy for the coming decade to let the EU become a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy and through its flagship initiatives, such as the “Digital Agenda for Europe” (DAE) and “Innovation Union” (IU), provides an opportunity for aligning SF with the strategy. Commitments 24 and 25 of the IU state that Member States should considerably improve their use of existing Structural Funds for research & innovation projects and should initiate the preparation of post 2013 Structural Fund programmes with an increased focus on innovation and smart specialisation

What, Why and How for NGIs

NGI as legal entities and legal entities that represents NGIs are eligible for funding and they should investigate submitting project proposals for approval in order to be awarded funding from SF.

The management of the SF is decentralised and each EU Member State has designated a managing authority that is responsible within the country for selecting projects and monitoring their implementation.² The general information about

accessing the funds is available at the EC website.³ In consultation with the EC, each region or Member State defines one or more operational programmes. These programmes are made-to-measure different socio-economic challenges of Member State or region.

NGI representatives will need to check with the Managing Authority in charge of the programme what possible funding themes and models provided under the SF Regulations are used in the specific region. Therefore, there can be situation that only certain regions within the Member states are eligible for the funding of particular research and innovation activities.⁴

It is important to note that any funding depends on the Managing authority budget planning, timing and application procedures. Thus, application procedures (e.g. calls for proposals on specific topics or competitions with fixed deadlines, on-going applications and project selection) and types of funding (grant, service/supply contract, financial instrument) can vary from country to country since defining these operational matters is in the Managing Authority responsibility.

Project selection criteria are agreed by a Monitoring Committee and are publicly available (e.g. on Managing Authority websites). Submitted projects proposals are evaluated according to these criteria. **In general, project proposals are evaluated by their scientific and research quality as well as impact on socio-economic development of the region.**

Applying for Structural Funds 2013

The latest figures (from October 2011) show that “only” 50 billions € have been spent so far on projects in research and innovation out of the 86 billions € available.

The current budget is available until the end of 2013 and it represents therefore an important opportunity for NGIs to access new funding. EGI.eu strongly encourages NGIs to explore this funding opportunity. NGIs should engage with the national/regional contact person and investigate if their infrastructure can be included in next year's proposal for funding. For example, by clicking on the Galicia region, is it possible to access the Galicia Operational Programme, Success Stories, Managing authorities

¹ <http://go.egi.eu/cohesion-policy>

² <http://go.egi.eu/sf-national-contacts>

³ <http://go.egi.eu/sf-how-to-apply>

⁴ <http://ec.europa.eu/research/infrastructures/pdf/synergies-fp-sf-mappingsfriprojects.pdf>

contact etc.⁵ By clicking on Programme Summaries, it is possible to discover that the first Priority for Galicia is “Development of the knowledge-based economy (R&D, information society and ICT)”.⁶

Thus, the following steps should be considered:

1. Identify contact persons by clicking on the map⁷ of the country/region of interest.
2. Check with the Managing Authority what possible funding themes and models are available in your region and whether NGI is eligible for funding
3. If NGI is eligible, analyse the regional operational programme and priorities
4. Define project proposal that will be aligned and contribute to regional priorities
5. Apply for funding according to the application procedure

Major changes for SF (2014-2020):

The future shape and objectives of CP, and consequently changes in SF, are defined in parallel with negotiations on the post-2013 EU budget.

Therefore, the major changes envisaged for the next funding cycle (2014-2020) concerning the allocation of SF are:

- Linking allocation of funds to the Europe 2020 objectives;
- Inviting Member States to sign partnership contracts;
- Focus resources on a small number of priorities;
- Increase emphasis on innovation and smart growth specialisation;
- Strengthen partnerships.

SF will focus on the Europe 2020 objectives. In addition, complementary links between SF and Horizon 2020 have been clarified. Strategic and operational coordination will be improved through joint meetings between authorities and agencies involved in Horizon 2020 and CP that will establish and exchange lists of projects for identifying and promoting synergies between complementary projects.

The EC stated that SF will be devoted to:

- Develop world-class research and ICT infrastructures;
- Establish networks of research facilities;
- Develop regional partner facilities.

Territorial impact will play a big role and pre-defined geographical distribution of funding will concentrate larger allocations to less developed regions. In addition, different funding rates will apply for different regions. **In the next funding cycle, support outside of the programme area up to 10% of funds can be spent outside the region** and it will

be useful for enabling combined support from CP and Horizon2020 to several partners in different countries.

The EC is encouraging national and regional authorities to adopt ‘**Smart Specialisation Strategies**’⁸ by concentrating resources on a limited number of priorities. These strategies have to be based on regional strengths, weaknesses and comparative advantages and should open up new opportunities by avoiding fragmentation, exploiting regional diversity and by stimulating cooperation across national and regional borders. This process implies a strengthening of regional partnership through closer cooperation between universities, research centres, businesses and other relevant stakeholders.

The Managing Authorities will explore the possibility to include research infrastructures in the future National or Regional Sectoral Operational Programs. For the evaluation of the project, the Managing Authorities will assess the impact of Research Infrastructure facilities on the economy of the region, in particular in terms of creation of jobs and development of innovative businesses (including spin-offs, start-ups, etc.).

Final Remarks

SF utilisation is crucial in closing the research and innovation divide in Europe. The EC will ensure that SF changes beyond 2013 include policy elements that will facilitate synergies between CP and Horizon2020.

Overall, the EC plans to spend more intelligently SF, to focus on a small number EU's top priorities and that SF spending adds visible value to what national and regional authorities are already doing. The planned changes for SF will increase the available funds for ICT research facilities and development projects on ICT products, services and applications.

In a period of financial constraints on public funding from national governments, there is an opportunity for NGIs to strengthen the relationships with the Managing Authorities responsible for the SF in order to fully utilise emerging funding opportunities and planned increased spending on ICT R&D. The potential introduction of SF as a revenue stream can help in developing a NGI's business model by increasing the diversity of funding (SF funding, EC project funding, service charging, etc.).

Therefore, EGI.eu recommends that NGIs investigate the possibility of using SF for 2013 as an integral part of their organisational plans. Further on, SF could be of crucial importance in defining the future funding environment of NGIs and their sustainability.

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/atlas2007/spain/es11_en.htm?1

⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/country/prordn/details_new.cfm?gv_PAY=ES&gv_reg=ALL&gv_PGM=1112&gv_defL=7&LAN=7

⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/atlas2007/index_en.htm

⁸ <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/home>