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The Local Dimension of the European Employment Strategy

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1. Introduction

While the local development of employment was once considered as marginal compared to macro-economic and structural strategies, it is now widely accepted that the mobilisation of local actors can considerably contribute to the success of employment policies; indeed employment policies can only succeed with their participation. This recognition is based on several considerations: employment policies are more often than not designed centrally but implemented locally; local actors from small and medium enterprises to municipalities, can significantly contribute to regional cohesion, innovation and entrepreneurship, and introduce new forms of employment creation; the promotion of social inclusion, equal opportunities and gender equality requires social support and democratic participation at the local level.

An important local dimension is also implied in areas with severe geographical or natural handicaps, i.e., mountain areas, peripheral areas and those with a very low population density.

However, while there is a general trend towards a greater consideration for the local dimension of employment, many obstacles identified in the past¹, persist. The European Employment Strategy (EES), and National Action Plans for employment (NAPs) in particular, provide a useful framework to overcome these obstacles but regional and local actors need to be better informed and involved in the EES process, and better use needs to

be made of existing policies and instruments at Community, national and sub-national level.

Member States and Community institutions play a supportive role, by being accessible to, and informing local actors, and promoting, evaluation, and the exchange of best practices and experience. The objective is to help local actors play their full part in the European Employment Strategy in cooperation with national authorities and Community institutions, pooling their resources, and establishing local employment strategies where appropriate, thus eventually increasing the employment rate in Europe and providing stable, quality jobs.²

One of the challenges for the local as a policy domain is to know what is covered by “local.” The EES approach accepts that what people mean by “local” is the result of their history, culture, place identity, language and power relations. Local covers both the tiny Hebridean island of Eigg and the sub-region containing the City of Leipzig: local is what local does.

2. Towards A Local Dimension of the European Employment Strategy

European institutions took note of the potential of local development in the fight against unemployment as early as 1984.³ However, local employment acquired an increasingly prominent role only after the Commission’s White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment⁴ was endorsed by the European

¹ “Acting Locally for Employment — A local Dimension for the European Employment Strategy”, COM (2000) final 196, 7 April 2000.

² “Strengthening the local dimension of the European Employment Strategy”, COM (2001) 629 final, 6 November 2001.

³ Council Resolution of 7 June 1984 (84/C-161/01). For an inventory of Community initiatives up to 1994, see Commission staff working paper SEC(94) 2199.

⁴ OPOCE, supplement 6/93.

Council in 1993.⁵

Since the Luxembourg process which launched the EES was initiated in 1997, the development of the local dimension has appeared as an integral part. This section analyses recent trends at the Community, national, regional and local levels.

The Treaty lays down the principles and procedures of a co-ordinated European Employment Strategy (EES). Title VIII, Article 128 details the steps leading to the formulation of such strategy, including, on an annual basis: Guidelines for employment and national reports on their implementation; recommendations to the Member States; and a Joint Employment Report by Council and Commission to the European Council.⁶

The EES, as revised in 2003, has three over-arching objectives: full employment; quality and productivity at work; and, social cohesion and inclusion. It contains eleven guidelines: to prevent long-term unemployment; to create more jobs and encourage entrepreneurship; to address change and promote adaptability and mobility; to promote the development of human capital and life-long learning; to ensure an adequate labour supply and promote an active older workforce; to ensure gender equality; to promote the integration of disadvantaged people, making work pay; reducing undeclared work; reducing regional employment disparities; a better governed EES.

To further focus Member States' employment policies and improve implementation of the EES, a European Employment Taskforce, chaired by Wim Kok, was set up in 2003. This concluded⁷ that the objectives and guidelines were well placed to steer EU employment policies but four areas should be priorities for actions; promoting adaptability of workers and enterprises; attracting more people to the labour force; investing more and more effectively in human capital, improved governance. The taskforce also concluded that the EU should make better use of the many good practices existing in various Member States and mutual learning should be strengthened.

2.1. The Role of the Local and Regional Level in the European Employment Strategy

While the EES tends to rely mainly on efforts at European and national level, there is a clear awareness that the objectives that the Union has set itself to improve performance in the area of employment cannot be achieved without greater participation of the regional and local levels.

In fact, since their inception, the Luxembourg process and the Employment Guidelines in particular have increasingly incorporated the local dimension, by inviting Member States to involve the regional and local levels. Starting with a focus on job creation at local level, the Guidelines underlined first *“the special role of local authorities and the social partners”* (1999), and then the need to support *“the special role and responsibility of (...) other partners at the regional and local levels, as well as the social partners”* (2000).

In March 2000, the Lisbon European Council created a strategy stressing the importance of interaction between economic, employment and social policies, of the mobilisation of all players, and established a reinforced open method of co-ordination, described as a *“fully decentralised approach, applied in line with the principle of subsidiarity in which the Union, the Member States, the regional and local levels, as well as the social partners and civil society will be actively involved, using variable forms of partnership.”*

A consistent, comprehensive approach was included in the Guidelines for 2001:

“All actors at the regional and local levels, including the social partners, must be mobilised to implement the European Employment Strategy by identifying the potential of job creation at local level and strengthening partnerships to this end.”

“11. Member States will (...) take into account, where appropriate, in their overall employment policy the regional development dimension (...); encourage local and regional authorities to

⁵ For an overview, see the Commission's Report on local development initiatives, 1998 (SEC 98-25).

⁶ For information and documents on employment policy and the EES, see the following website: http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/index_en.htm.

⁷ “Jobs, jobs, jobs: creating more employment in Europe” November 2003, Brussels.

develop strategies for employment in order to exploit fully the possibilities offered by job creation at local level and promote partnerships to this end with all the actors concerned, including the representatives of civil society(···). ”⁸

And the revised Guidelines in 2003 (confirmed for 2004) say:

“Member States should implement a broad approach towards reducing regional employment and unemployment disparities. The potential for job creation at the local level, including in the social economy, should be supported and partnerships between all relevant actors should be encouraged. Member States will:

- *Promote favourable conditions for private sector activity and investment in regions lagging behind.*
- *Ensure that public support in regions lagging behind is focused on investment in human and knowledge capital, as well as adequate infrastructure (see also BEPGs, guidelines 18 and 19).*

The potential of the Cohesion and Structural Funds and the European Investment Bank should be fully exploited.

European Social Partners at interprofessional and sectoral level are invited to contribute to the implementation of the Employment guidelines and to support efforts undertaken by the national social partners at all levels, such as at interprofessional, sectoral and local level. ”

2.2. Trends in the Member States

The implementation of the EES at the national level, notably through the National Action Plans for employment (NAPs), underscores a broad trend within the Member States towards decentralisation, as well as an increasing support for the social economy and for the establishment of partnerships.

An increasing role for regional and local actors

National employment policies increasingly take into account the role that local and regional actors can play in the EES and national employment plans. The Joint Employment Report (JER) for 2003/2004 stated that *“All Member States implement some form of regional and/or local employment policy for combating these disparities, often underpinned by Structural Fund Programmes. However, insufficient information is available in the NAPs for assessing the extent to which Member States develop and implement policies aimed at reducing regional employment and unemployment disparities.”*

The NAPs for 2004 highlight that Member States increasingly accept or actively promote closer co-operation of the regional and/or local authorities in the establishment and implementation of their plans. Several Member States have allowed their respective regional and local actors to join the EES process and, in some cases, have actively supported this development. Although the involvement of the regional level is higher than the local, nationwide programmes tend to be designed in a more flexible way that takes into account the territorial dimension. Programme implementation is being adapted to different circumstances, and increasingly complemented by specific regional or local programmes.

The forms of co-operation of regional and local authorities in the development of the NAPs are quite diverse; in some cases, it tends to become institutionalised. **Regional Action Plans** (RAPs) have emerged in several Member States (Finland, Portugal and the United Kingdom). Greece, France, Ireland and Sweden have developed **Local Action Plans** (LAPs).

The NAPs for 2004 highlight “In PL a law establishes that each region has to draw up its own action plan on the basis of the national guidance, through consultation with social partners and local authorities. An evaluation of the Territorial Employment Pacts (TEPs) in AT shows these pacts helped improve the efficiency, effectiveness and transparency of regional labour market policy, and provided a better matching of policy with local needs. IT takes a regional approach for the cover-

⁸ The National Action Plans for 2004, the Employment Guidelines for 2004, the Recommendations addressed to the individual Member States, and the Joint Employment Report are available on the internet as of their adoption: http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/empl/esf/ees_en.htm.

age of each guideline. Countries that combine a strong role for local authorities (municipalities, local PES and local social security institutions) with strong employment performance include DK, UK and NL. A trend to decentralise labour market policy (delivery) is also visible in many new Member States such as PL and SK, the success of which will much depend on building the necessary capacity at the local level.

A few Member States (FR, EL, IT, UK) have introduced specific targets to reduce sub-national disparities. The UK reports on positive progress against the target to increase the employment rate and reduce disparities for the 30 local areas showing the greatest gaps. However, the other three Member States do not report on progress and there is no indication that any of the new Member States plan to introduce such national targets.

Regions themselves are often taking over the task of promoting involvement at the sub-regional level. Some procedural aspects of the open coordination method (definition of objectives, implementation, reporting, assessment) are also taken up and used in the relationship - in some cases contractual - between national governments and localities.

Support for the Social economy and Partnerships

Member States increasingly address the social economy as an important factor for local development along with enterprises and an appropriate institutional framework. However, there are widely differing understandings of the meaning of social economy. While all Member States include the main components of the social economy (co-operatives, mutuals, associations, foundations, voluntary and community organisations), the principle of treating these elements as a cohesive group is not common to all Member States.

Greece supports entrepreneurship in the social economy, in particular on remote islands and in the mountain regions. In France, the social economy is an integral part of the contractual relationship with regions and localities. Sweden devotes financial support to local cooperative development centres, to strengthen knowledge of the co-operative society. Austria gives financial support to “Sozialökonomische Betriebe” for special target groups working in market niches. In Belgium, a co-operative agreement exists between the Government and the Regions/German community for financial support to job creation in the social economy.

The concept of partnership at the local level is not well defined in all Member States, particularly as concerns the role of local policy-makers and administrations in creating and managing partnerships. However, social partners and Public Employment Services (PES) are increasingly involved in local strategy development and implementation; they have acquired a specific and important role in the local and regional labour markets. In some cases, PES now play an active role in implementing and developing regional and local employment strategies and programmes (e.g. France).

The Commission has underlined the role that local and regional actors can play in the development of new forms of governance in the Union. However, the level of involvement of regional and local actors in the EES depends on the political and constitutional structures of each Member State, and must be determined in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity.

Encouraging entrepreneurship

The local level is ideally suited for encouraging entrepreneurship, especially through the setting up and development of new, small and innovative enterprises. The identified areas where substantial progress is needed include availability of finance for small enterprises, an adequate regulatory and administrative framework and a climate supportive to entrepreneurship and innovation.

2.3 The Role of the Commission

The Commission's main role has been to:

- promote the **information of local actors** on the EES and NAPs, as well as the exchange of best practices, benchmarking and peer review in the implementation of NAPs in the area of local development and in particular to
 - attach a priority to local employment in its own information activities. It facilitates access of local actors to Community programmes and initiatives by setting up a **local development website** and coordination between the different Commission services involved;
 - propose the inclusion of local employment among the **priorities of Member States' information policies**, notably through the

existing institutional bodies such as the Social Fund Committee, the Employment Committee and the Informal Network of ESF Information Officers (INIO);

- **monitor and support the development of local employment strategies** in order to promote an integrated approach to local development in the Member States, notably through National Action Plans and the Employment Committee (EMCO); through NAPs for Social Inclusion; and through the implementation of the ESF Regulation's provisions aimed at facilitating the participation of local partners and NGOs in ESF-supported programmes;
- to support (often via grants) pilot measures/projects for local employment development, often transnational, such as the Preparatory Measures for a Local Commitment to Employment.⁹ However, there will be less such support in the future, and more emphasis on identifying, sharing and disseminating good practice (eg. IDELE, results of our evaluations). There will also be a greater focus on being a source of advice/guidance; increasing awareness of LED and the EES; encouraging co-operation and partnership; etc. There will still be financial support via the ESF though there will be less of it and it will be spread more thinly.
- ensure that the experiences gained in the development of local employment strategies, including as concerns the promotion of gender equality, are disseminated within Member States (and candidate countries), and integrated in the EES. For this purpose, the Commission **held, at the beginning of 2003, a Local Development Forum** where the parties concerned - local and regional actors, national governments, the European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Committee - could meet, exchange experiences and information, and contribute to the development of the EES. The ten **candidate countries** participated in the forum;
- **assist local actors** who wish to engage in a more

strategic approach to local development, including local employment strategies and Local Action Plans established in the institutional framework of the Member States' National Action Plans. The Commission provides support through the available financial instruments, and in particular the ESF Art. 6 programme on innovative actions. Financial support required to implement local programmes for employment, human resources development, and social inclusion, is included in mainstream operational programmes such as the ESF.

- intensify **co-operation with other international organisations** active in this field, in particular the OECD and ILO, in order to draw on their experience and to widen the dissemination of the lessons learnt at European level to other non-EU countries.

3. Developing Local Employment Strategies

The Commission considers that the development of a local dimension in the EES can significantly contribute to the wider Community objectives of full employment, sustainable economic growth, and social cohesion, particularly in an enlarged Union.

The fight against poverty and social exclusion is a complex policy area, not limited to the issue of access to the labour market: it involves employment as well as housing, education or health, and requires the mobilisation of a wide range of policies and actors. However, social exclusion has become an essential element of the Lisbon process and of mainstream ESF:¹⁰ special attention will be given to the link between the employment strategy and the inclusion process in terms of labour market participation for the most vulnerable at the local level.

The Commission seeks to increase the contribution of local actors to the success of all three overarching objectives of the EES: full employment, productivity and quality jobs, social inclusion and social cohesion.

To this end, in line with Employment Guideline 10 and with the recent trends in the Member States high-

⁹ http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/local_employment/projects_en.htm.

¹⁰ See Chapter 3.2.

lighted in Chapter 2.2. above, the Commission encourages, on the one hand, the dissemination of best practices and experiences in the Member States. On the other hand, the development wherever possible of **local employment strategies**.

These strategies may be structured and formalised, in agreement between national and subnational actors, into **Local Action Plans** (LAPs) within the framework of the existing National Action Plans established by Member States.

This can be achieved within the existing process and institutional mechanisms within Member States, and in full compliance with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality:

- by strengthening the links between different territorial decision-making levels;
- by increasing the effectiveness and co-ordination of existing Community policies and instruments;
- by empowering local actors, especially women, drawing on their views and experience, and developing the factors for success of a local employment strategy.

Local development is a cross-cutting policy area. It covers not only employment, but also, among others: gender equality, social inclusion, economic development, innovation, information society. Indeed, a number of policies and initiatives taken at Community, national and sub-national levels may have a more significant impact on local employment than those specifically targeted to local development. Therefore, evaluation in this area is essential for future policy development.

3.1. Strengthening the Links between Local, Regional, National and Community Levels

The institutional and administrative structures of present and indeed future EU Member States vary considerably. It would therefore be pointless — and beyond Community competence — to establish common, prescriptive rules for the articulation between different territorial levels.

Depending on the particular legal and administrative framework of different Member States, responsibility for different aspects of economic development policy and social policy may be allocated to the national, regional or local levels. It is therefore important to facilitate coordination between policy-makers at different

levels in order to ensure that these policies contribute effectively to local employment strategies.

The development of a local dimension of the EES requires political will at Community, national, regional and local level, as well as awareness-raising, experimentation and exchange of good practices. Local authorities and actors are often confined to implementing measures decided at national or regional level. The EES, National Action Plans and NAPs for Social Inclusion, as well as Structural Funds programmes, are not sufficiently well-known at regional and local levels. That said, projects supported under the Community Initiatives and Innovative Actions often have a higher visibility at local level.

Local actors need to be fully informed of EU and national policies and, taking these fully into account, be encouraged whenever possible to design local employment strategies as opposed to isolated initiatives and projects.

A local employment strategy should aim at developing employment on a given territory through an integrated set of measures and action plan. The strategy should consist in: **targeting a local area**; establishing a **local diagnosis** of strengths and weaknesses; **identifying potential actors** and developing mechanisms to co-ordinate their inputs; analysing opportunities and threats regarding employment in the targeted territory; and **involving regional and national authorities**, drawing from the relevant National Action Plan for employment.

In order to increase their potential for a sustained impact on employment, local strategies should: be consistent with the objectives and priorities of NAPs; be agreed between the various levels of competent authorities and local actors, on the basis of a shared diagnosis of problems and assets; and be translated into a specific action plan. While local authorities and actors must build on the employment Guidelines and NAPs when drawing up their strategies, **the process should be two-way**: Community, national and regional actors should in turn inform and involve local players in the NAP process.

In this respect, it is particularly important to promote the exchanges of information between all public and private actors involved in the EES (administrations, social partners, public employment services, NGOs). Better consistency can also be ensured through direct involvement in local partnerships of representatives of head offices and organisations operating at regional and

national level.

In order to contribute to this process while taking into account the Member States' diverse legal and administrative structures, the Commission has proposed that Member States include the issue of local employment in their national information policy priorities, including through the work programme of the European Social Fund's Informal Network of Information Officers.

3.2. Building on Experience and Making Better Use of Existing Instruments

At the EU level, a number of initiatives have highlighted the potential of the local level in promoting employment. As early as 1993, with the publication of the "White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment," the Commission emphasised the importance of job creation and new sources of employment, particularly in the area of services supplied at local level.¹¹ The 89 Territorial Employment Pacts (TEPs) launched as pilot projects in 1997 reflected this orientation.¹² Local employment development has further been explored through various programmes at the Community¹³ and Member State level.

The EU EURES service, designed to facilitate the exercising of the right of EU and EEA citizens to work in another Member State, provides information, advice and placement assistance based on a network of experts, a large number of contact points in partner organisations and a free-access service on the Internet. **Cross-border EURES** makes a special contribution to local development on the basis of local partnerships, and to the social dialogue on employment policy in cross border areas.¹⁴

Significant lessons can be extracted from several

EU programmes and initiatives conducted in policy areas other than employment.¹⁵ The Leonardo da Vinci programme has contributed to local employment development, in particular by maintaining traditional skills and professions as well as developing new ones. It has moreover promoted guidance at local level.

The URBAN Community Initiative focuses explicitly on local areas, in recognition of the fact that national or regional responses are sometimes too generalised to tackle the particular needs of a locality and that those who live and work there are often best placed to develop appropriate measures. URBAN has followed this area based approach, with an emphasis on capacity building, greater local autonomy and enhanced targeting of action, as well as a greater ability to concentrate on areas of particular need. It covers a wide range of projects combining renewal of obsolete infrastructure with measures designed to stimulate the economy and employment.

The role of the Structural Funds

The emphasis from isolated local employment initiatives to integrated strategies is already being reflected in mainstream Community policies and programmes.

The Regulations governing the Structural Funds for the 2000-2006 period state that the Funds should play a particular role in favour of local economic development, by promoting, among others, TEPs (now included in the Regional Fund Regulation) and new sources of employment, and by measures to encourage and support local development and employment initiatives.¹⁶

The creation of a broad partnership, encompassing a wider range of institutional, private and associative actors at regional and local level is a key feature of the Structural Funds programmes. There has been a clear trend in the Member States towards greater involvement

¹¹ Commission Communication on A European strategy for encouraging local development and employment initiative OJ COM (95) 273, Brussels, 13 June 1995.

¹² On TEPs, see the Commission services' document (November 1999) at the TEP website: <http://inforegio.cec.eu.int/pacts>.

¹³ Article 6 of the European Social Fund (New Job Sources and Local Social Capital), the Incentive measure programme under Article 129 of the Treaty, the ADAPT and EMPLOYMENT Community Initiatives, the pilot projects for long term unemployed (B5-502) and the Third system and Employment pilot action programme.

¹⁴ See Eures website: http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/elm/eures/en/index.htm.

¹⁵ e.g. LEADER on rural development, URBAN on urban development, Article 10 of ERDF on new sources of jobs, innovation and information and communication technology, Fourth Programme of Targeted Socio-Economic Research and the projects funded under the Preparatory Actions to combat and prevent social exclusion.

¹⁶ Regulation (EC) No 1784/1999 of 12 July 1999 on the ESFund, O.J. 13.8.1999, p L213/6, Article 2.2 (a).

of regional and local authorities in the whole programming cycle, which should contribute to foster regional and local actors' empowerment with respect to the assistance supported by the Funds. There is a particularly strong emphasis on this aspect in the Structural Fund programmes of Italy, Spain and France, where the experience gained under the Territorial Employment Pacts is reflected in local development priorities in mainstream programmes for 2000-2006.

In the context of a decentralised programming exercise, local authorities have increased their participation in implementing operations co-financed by the Structural Funds, especially in those Member States where local partners play a key role in the delivery of policies selected for support from the Funds. Moreover, their involvement in the formulation of the main policy priorities for assistance from the Funds has enabled locally-tailored needs to be taken into account in the strategies and priorities set out in the programmes. The fundamental objective of the greater involvement of regional and local authorities in the programming cycle is enhanced relevance and therefore effectiveness and impact of the interventions implemented with the support of the Structural Funds.

Local development is thus supported through a dual approach: as a cross-cutting theme to be mainstreamed throughout the planned priorities, and as a specific measure for promoting local employment initiatives and the social economy.

An analysis of how the European Social Fund (ESF) in particular has supported the EES in the 2000-2006 programming period highlights improvements in the regional and local dimension of the implementation of the Fund. The ESF Regulation contains a specific provision aimed at facilitating the participation local partners and NGOs in ESF supported programmes in the form of small grant schemes.¹⁷ The appointment of local organisations as intermediate structures responsible for allocating small grants to micro projects, make it easier for local actors to benefit from ESF co-financing to implement projects stemming from their own initiative.

Within the programmes under objectives 1, 2 and 3, the European Social Fund embraces an integrated strategy the fight against exclusion in the labour market. Reducing unemployment is not often possible if other forms of exclusion are not also tackled. This comprehensive approach in promoting social inclusion in the labour market calls for a greater participation of all relevant actors, notably those at the core of exclusion problems, in the design, implementation and monitoring of ESF monies. It represents a new challenge for the ESF to build on the existing capacities at local level, by promoting wider access of local actors such as social partners, NGOs and other small local organisations, as full beneficiaries of the ESF.

Between 2000 and 2006, the ESF will have devoted around € 9 billion to promote social inclusion activities in the Member States, through measures aiming to improve the employability and education of the most disadvantaged groups and measures addressing discrimination and inequality in the access to labour market.

The role of EQUAL

The EQUAL programme will have provided € 2.8 billion over the period 2000-2006. Building on the lessons from the previous Community Initiatives — especially EMPLOYMENT—it tests out new approaches to meet the needs of those who are excluded or discriminated against in the labour market. It has therefore the potential to provide an essential contribution to local employment development.¹⁸

The Commission has used EQUAL to develop partnerships, notably at the regional and local level, and build on the two key success factors identified through evaluation: a high degree of local/regional networking, and collaboration in disseminating and transferring the results.

The role of innovative actions under ESF Article 6

Among the various Community financial instruments which can support local employment, the

¹⁷ Article 4.2 of Regulation (EC) 1784/1999 on the ESF provides that Member States will allocate a reasonable amount of Objectives 1 and 3 appropriations for global grants, managed by intermediary bodies that will in turn offer support in the form of small grants to NGOs and local partnerships. Most Member States' programmes have allocated 0.5% to 1% of the appropriations to this form of support.

¹⁸ See EQUAL website at: http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/equal/equal.cfm.

Innovative Actions under Art.6 of the ESF Regulation¹⁹ play an important role in testing new approaches and identifying good practices which may subsequently improve the implementation and outcome of operations supported by the Structural Funds.

During the 1994-1999 programming period, ESF Article 6 supported a range of projects in the field of employment creation and vocational training, most of which had a local focus. In its January 2001 Communication on the implementation of Article 6, the Commission emphasised the importance of close co-operation between European institutions and national, regional and local governments, as well as the social partners and Third System organisations; the Communication also stated that, innovative measures would concentrate on a defined number of priority themes, one of which is “Local employment strategies and innovation.”

The Commission wishes to ensure that local development continues to be a priority. Currently, Art. 6 fulfils a role as a test-bed of new ideas and processes that can influence the mainstream ESF. Greater attention has been paid in recent years to ongoing monitoring and evaluation of projects and networking between project promoters, the Commission, Member States and experts.²⁰

Involving local actors in the promotion of gender equality

A key element of the EES, now at the heart of the ESF, is the promotion of gender equality. Taking into account ten Employment Guidelines, the ESF and local employment strategies therefore now include gender mainstreaming as well as specific gender equality measures.²¹

Since local employment is also a horizontal priority in the current ESF regulation, measures to promote women’s access and participation in the labour market must also include support for local initiatives.

When developing a local employment strategy, the gender dimension should be integrated into the diagno-

sis of the territory. In setting the objectives of a strategy, attention should be paid to new job opportunities for women to enter or re-enter the labour market (information society, environment, leisure, tourism, culture, local products, welfare and personal services).

Women, of course, should be actors as well as target groups in local employment strategies. This implies: the involvement of equal opportunities bodies in local authorities; gender balance in committees; increased participation of women in local social partner organisations; the use of the skills and experience of in the social economy and the voluntary sector, where women play a major role; and the involvement of women’s NGO’s in local and regional partnerships and Territorial Employment Pacts.

Local actors themselves can play the most significant role in the establishment of local employment strategies with a gender equality component. In particular :

- Local authorities, as main or “model” employers, can promote women’s employment and quality in the administration and public services, notably by measures to reconcile work and family life and to promote women in management positions. They can support entrepreneurial activities of women, and improve infrastructures that are important for women in rural areas;
- Local enterprises as employers can enhance women’s career prospects (for instance, by acting as mentors for smaller firms set up by women);
- The 3rd system/social economy organisations can improve women’s access to the labour market, by offering services that women deliver in the domestic sphere, and jobs for women re-entering the labour market;
- Social partners can promote women’s career opportunities and the reconciliation of work and family life, both at enterprise level (e.g. flexible working time arrangements), and at territorial level, e.g. by speeding up implementation of

¹⁹ Regulation N° 1262/1999 of 21 June 1999, OJ 26.6.1999, L 161/48.

²⁰ http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/esf2000/article_6-en.htm.

²¹ Although it is difficult to put a precise figure on overall investment, specific actions to promote gender equality supported under the ESF will have provided nearly € 4 billion between 2000-2006. Funds supporting mainstreaming actions would increase this amount significantly.

directives and social-partner agreements in this field;

- Local public employment services can act as model employers, e.g. by gender mainstreaming and by offering gender training to their staff.
- Education and training institutions can help women improve their career prospects, and provide gender training for local actors.

3.3. Better Information and Exchange of Good Practice

Dissemination of good practises: IDELE

The Commission launched the project ‘**IDELE**’ in order to identify, disseminate and exchange good practices among Member States in the field of local and regional employment development, including the social economy. The project started in November 2003, and will run for three years.²²

The first stage is the rigorous and systematic identification of examples of good practice with respect to regional and local employment development, based on the development of a methodology for identifying good practice examples. The focus is, at least initially, on the ‘old’ (EU15) Member States, and on particular pre-determined themes — eg. integrating immigrants in large urban areas, employment development in remote areas. This is followed by an exchange of good practice between Member States via the organisation of 12 seminars, focussed on different policy themes. According to the subject of the seminar, participants comprise relevant stakeholders and experts from all levels, in particular the regional and local ones. The key aim is to identify which approaches and policies, or which particular elements thereof, have the potential for transfer to other localities. After the seminars comes the important dissemination stage — communicating the results of the seminars regarding good practice examples and experiences across the EU25. The first four seminars took place in 2004.

IDELE will contribute to the assessment of the local employment dimension through the peer review programme in the framework of the European Employment Strategy. The relevant Committees at European level —

Employment Committee (EMCO), European Social Fund Committee — will be regularly informed about the policy actions and measures identified and the results of the seminars.

Practical Handbook for local actors

The objective of the handbook is to provide actors involved in local employment development in each Member State with a practical tool indicating the best approaches for designing, developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating successful local employment development strategies. It presents the key principles, documented with concrete examples already tested in developing local employment strategies within the EU and elsewhere.

While describing in a practical way the necessary steps for putting local employment development plans into place, it also presents current Community policies and instruments providing support for local development. Sixteen handbooks have been published. Each comprises a common core followed by a part specific to each EU15 Member State, plus one (in English) for the New Member States.²³

Promoting benchmarking

A study on benchmarking has just been launched in and will be finalised and published in one year’s time. Benchmarking is essentially a tool for management by objectives, and can usefully contribute to improving Local Employment Development. A number of benchmarking exercises in the area of employment policy are already operating at EU and national level, but most of them are at an early stage and have been initiated on an experimental basis. The experience in benchmarking, self-evaluation and mutual learning networks in local employment gained in different Member States should be exploited in a more systematic way. Thus, this activity aims at:

- Providing an overview of existing experiences on benchmarking in employment policy at the local level, from EU15 and the rest of Europe, from international organisations (e.g. OECD and ILO), from existing academic research, and from practitioners using the instrument of benchmarking for

²² <http://www.ecotec.com/idele/>

²³ http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/local_employment/publi_en.htm.

employment; it will then draw the key lessons from this existing experience and information;

- Disseminating information on benchmarking at local level, in order to promote its efficient use through a seminar, involving key local stakeholders, such as local governments, public employment services (PES), and other associations.

3.4. Overall Thematic Evaluation of Local Development

An overall thematic evaluation was finalised in February 2004, it assessed a variety of types of EU programmes with respect to their specific impact on local employment development and to the added value of EU local employment policy. It focused in particular on how and the extent to which the different types of EU programmes support employment development at local level and what lessons can be drawn as to how their impact can be enhanced in this specific area.

The results of the evaluation are based on country analysis and on one case study in each Member State. The evaluation states that initiatives and themes of the EES have facilitated and supported LED policies, strongly supported by pilot programmes (e.g. Territorial Employment Pacts, Third System, Local Social Capital, etc.) and Structural Funds support under Objective 1. Another finding was that sustainability of local development approaches is determined by the commitment of national governments to a decentralised employment and labour market policy, the commitment of local actors to local employment development, and the provision of EU funding.²⁴

4. Conclusions

The European Employment Strategy is now a well established vehicle for the promotion of more and better jobs. **At the Community level**, through the employment guidelines, annual examination and peer review of Member States' performance, and recommendations to individual countries, the EES is providing an integrated framework to meet the Union's objectives in the field of employment and labour market reforms. **At the Member State's level**, through the NAPs and both community and national financial support, the Employment Guidelines are translated into a coherent employment strategy.

At the **regional and local levels**, actors have been given the opportunity to work increasingly together, to interact with national and European institutions and policies, and to develop partnerships in support of the European Employment Strategy. Local actors also have a key role to play in promoting gender equality and developing integrated approaches to social inclusion.

The local dimension is playing a key role in Member States' implementation of the EES and the new focus on the four priorities first identified in the Employment Taskforce: increased adaptability for workers and enterprises; attracting more people into the workforce; investing more and better in human capital; improving governance. But the European Union and the Member States will have to do even more to involve regional and local actors, this is itself a key aspect of improved governance.

²⁴ http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/local_employment/evaluation_en.htm.