



ESF thematic experts plan the way forward

Toby Johnson, Team Leader, ESF Transnational Platform

In late October the ESF Transnational Platform held an internal seminar for its 13 thematic experts.

The accompanying presentation sets out the main trends that we've observed over the first year of our [4-year contract](#):

An average of 10 countries attend each of our [9 Thematic Networks](#) – although the most popular, Simplification, attracts no fewer than 24.

We started off hosting the meetings at AEIDL in Brussels, but one welcome trend is that Member States are showing themselves increasingly keen to host meetings in their own capitals. This improves the dynamics of the networks and gives members the chance to visit and peer review relevant initiatives. After three meetings each, the networks are finding their feet. But we still face challenges because of the very varying levels of knowledge that their members have – they may know about the mechanics of running the Social Fund but they don't all have much background in employment or inclusion policy.

The main setback we've faced is in enabling – or persuading – the managing authorities to coordinate their calls for proposals. The big idea was that they would all publish their calls to a common timetable, thus making it easy for projects to find partners abroad. However in the event, the first round of 'coordinated calls' only attracted four Member States or regions – Flanders, Finland, Poland and Sweden. It has resulted in approximately 100 transnational partnerships worth about €14 million. Not much for a fund spending €12 billion a year! We have reacted by organising a capacity-building seminar for those managing authorities who are hesitating.

The seminar came up with lots of good ideas, from raising transnationality's profile by publishing more flagship products (the first is to be on social service integration), to an adapted strategy to involve employers. We'll be putting these into practice in coming months.

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