

Procedure file

Basic information		
INI - Own-initiative procedure	2008/2061(INI)	Procedure completed
Best practices in the field of regional policy and obstacles to the use of the Structural Funds		
Subject		
4.70 Regional policy		
4.70.01 Structural funds, investment funds in general, programmes		

Key players			
European Parliament	Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
	REGI Regional Development		26/03/2008
		PSE KREHL Constanze	
	Committee for opinion	Rapporteur for opinion	Appointed
	BUDG Budgets		20/09/2004
		ALDE GRIESBECK Nathalie	
European Commission	Commission DG	Commissioner	
	Regional and Urban Policy	HÜBNER Danuta	

Key events			
13/03/2008	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
12/02/2009	Vote in committee		Summary
24/02/2009	Committee report tabled for plenary	A6-0095/2009	
24/03/2009	Results of vote in Parliament		
24/03/2009	Debate in Parliament		
24/03/2009	Decision by Parliament	T6-0156/2009	Summary
24/03/2009	End of procedure in Parliament		

Technical information	
Procedure reference	2008/2061(INI)
Procedure type	INI - Own-initiative procedure
Procedure subtype	Initiative
Legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 54; Rules of Procedure EP 54-p4

Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	REGI/6/60372

Documentation gateway

Committee draft report		PE418.035	17/12/2008	EP	
Committee opinion	BUDG	PE412.050	23/01/2009	EP	
Amendments tabled in committee		PE418.350	27/01/2009	EP	
Amendments tabled in committee		PE419.859	28/01/2009	EP	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A6-0095/2009	24/02/2009	EP	
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T6-0156/2009	24/03/2009	EP	Summary
Commission response to text adopted in plenary		SP(2009)3060	04/06/2009	EC	

Best practices in the field of regional policy and obstacles to the use of the Structural Funds

The Committee on Regional Development adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Constanze Angela KREHL (PES, DE) on best practices in the field of regional policy and obstacles to the use of the structural funds. It notes that the regions of the EU are confronted with broadly similar challenges, though their impact differs greatly from region to region: globalisation and the accelerated economic restructuring that goes with it, the consequences of the technological revolution, and climate change, the development of the knowledge-based economy, demographic change, and the rise in immigration. Cohesion policy cannot develop its full potential to meet these challenges since potential applicants for aid are faced with major obstacles in relation to utilising the EU's structural funds, including: excessive bureaucracy too many complex regulations, frequent modification, by certain Member States, of eligibility criteria and requisite documentation; lack of transparency in decision-making processes and co-financing schemes and delays in payments, cumbersome centrally managed administration in Member States; and inadequate decentralised administrative capacity and different models of regional administration in Member States, which prevent the existence of comparative data and the exchange of best practices.

The committee underlines that, although the added value of disseminating best practices among the broader public has to be taken into account, attempts to introduce those practices in EU regional policy should be directed chiefly to Managing Authorities. The latter should be helped to draw up rules governing access to structural resources, so that exchanges of information and experience can contribute to a substantive improvement in project quality, by providing solutions to joint problems and choosing more effective interventions. Members point to the need to simplify the procedures governing the implementation of Structural Funds projects and programmes, particularly as regards management and control systems. Removal of obstacles: the Commission is asked to enact a series of specified measures, such as gearing the evaluation criteria for projects co-financed by the structural funds of the EU to the long term. Members recommend that the Commission go further and develop a concerted, approach to the interregional exchange of best practices, with a view to enabling actors involved in cohesion policy to draw on the experience of others. Bureaucracy in the use of Structural Funds must be kept to a minimum, and not needlessly increased by individual conditions imposed by Member States.

General and subject-specific criteria for identifying best practices: the report criticises the lack of transparency in the Commission's objective bases for identifying best practices, and calls on the Commission, in the light of the widespread use of the term 'best practices', and also the frequent parallel use of the terms 'good practices' or 'success stories', to draw up a set of criteria tailored specifically to cohesion policy that will enable these 'best practices' to be distinguished from those applying to other projects.

Members went on to recommend that the Commission take account of 16 factors in identifying best practices, amongst them, project quality, assurance of partnership principle and sustainability of the measure concerned.

They also recommend that, on the basis of analysis of a large number of projects from many EU regions, additional factors be taken into account for the identification of best practices in cohesion policy areas that are of particular importance for the development of specific regions and of the EU as a whole and that display a marked variety of approaches to implementation.

The committee recommends that account be taken of a series of factors for each of the following areas: 'Research and development/innovation'; 'Environment, climate and sustainable energy policy'; 'Creation of high-quality jobs'; 'Lifelong learning'; 'Integrated urban development'; 'Demographic change'; 'Cross-border cooperation'; and 'Public-private partnerships'.

It is aware that it is exceptionally difficult for a project cumulatively to meet all of these criteria, and calls on the Commission to list the criteria in order of priority, so as to make it easier to designate noteworthy projects as best practices.

Exchange of best practices: Members ask the Commission to do the following:

- to coordinate the exchange of best practices through a network of regions, and to create a public website containing key information about the projects in all Community languages for this purpose;
- to set up within the current administrative framework a specific office in the Directorate-General for Regional Policy to organise, the evaluation, collection and exchange of best practices and to act as a permanent contact point for both the supply and the demand side, with the aim of establishing a long-term, and successful exchange of best practices in the field of cohesion policy;

- to use the available tools of the Committee of the Regions, in particular the Lisbon Monitoring Platform and the Subsidiarity Monitoring Network in order to exchange best practices between regions and Member States.

Best practices in the field of regional policy and obstacles to the use of the Structural Funds

The European Parliament adopted by 585 votes to 35, with 42 abstentions, a resolution on best practices in the field of regional policy and obstacles to the use of the Structural Funds.

Broadly similar challenges for all regions: the resolution notes that the regions of the EU are confronted with broadly similar challenges, though their impact differs greatly from region to region: globalisation and the accelerated economic restructuring that goes with it, the opening up of trade relations, the consequences of the technological revolution, and climate change, the development of the knowledge-based economy, demographic change, depopulation and the rise in immigration.

Cohesion policy cannot develop its full potential to meet these challenges whilst potential applicants for aid are faced with major obstacles in relation to utilising the European Union's structural funds, including: excessive bureaucracy, too many complex regulations (which in certain cases are available on-line only), frequent modification of eligibility criteria, lack of transparency in decision-making processes and co-financing schemes, inadequate arrangements for interregional coordination and lack of a functioning cooperation scheme between national, regional and local authorities.

Simplifying the procedures: the Parliament stresses that disseminating best practices in EU regional policy should be directed chiefly to Managing Authorities, guiding them to draw up rules governing access to structural resources, so that exchanges of information and experience can contribute to a substantive improvement in project quality, by providing solutions to joint problems and choosing more effective and targeted interventions. MEPs stress in particular the need to simplify the procedures governing the implementation of Structural Funds projects and programmes, particularly as regards management and control systems.

Removing obstacles: the Commission is called upon to take a certain number of measures, such as: (i) to gear the evaluation criteria for projects co-financed by the Structural Funds to the long term; (ii) to develop specific evaluation criteria for innovative projects; (iii) to draw up special policy measures for regions with specific geographical characteristics; (iv) to coordinate the rules on cost eligibility with the Member States; (v) to ensure advance payments to beneficiaries to a greater extent.

The resolution recommends that the Commission go further and develop a concerted, approach to the interregional exchange of best practices , with a view to enabling actors involved in cohesion policy to draw on the experience of others. Identifying best practices must not lead to additional red tape for applicants and project promoters and bureaucracy in the use of Structural Funds must be kept to a minimum.

General and subject-specific criteria for identifying best practices: MEPs criticise the lack of transparency in the Commission's objective bases for identifying best practices. They call on the Commission to draw up a set of criteria tailored specifically to cohesion policy that will enable these 'best practices' to be distinguished from those applying to other projects.

The Commission is called upon to take account of 16 general criteria in identifying best practices, including project quality and its innovativeness, assurance of the partnership principle, sustainability of the measure concerned and the impact on employment and SMEs.

Additional factors: the Parliament recommends that, on the basis of analysis of a large number of projects from many EU regions, additional factors be taken into account for the identification of best practices in cohesion policy areas that are of particular importance for the development of specific regions and of the EU as a whole and that display a marked variety of approaches to implementation.

Moreover, MEPs recommend that a number of factors be taken into account for the following areas: (i) research and development/innovation; (ii) environment, climate and sustainable energy policy; (iii) creation of high-quality jobs; (iv) lifelong learning; (v) integrated urban development; (vi) demographic change; (vii) cross-border cooperation; (viii) public-private partnerships.

MEPs are aware that it is exceptionally difficult for a project cumulatively to meet all of the above criteria and call on the Commission, therefore, before applying these criteria, to list them in order of priority and to determine those that represent a higher priority.

Exchange of best practices: the Commission is called upon to:

- organise and coordinate the exchange of best practices through a network of regions, and to create a public website containing key information about the projects in all Community languages for this purpose;
- set up within the current administrative framework a specific office in the Directorate-General for Regional Policy to organise, in cooperation with this network of regions, the evaluation, collection and exchange of best practices, and to disseminate this good-practice culture to all its departments;
- use the available tools of the Committee of the Regions, in particular the Lisbon Monitoring Platform and the Subsidiarity Monitoring Network in order to exchange best practices between regions and Member States.