



Briefing

New health system perspectives building on the EU Council Conclusions



Learning from the past and anticipating the future...

Introduction

The recent EU reflection on the Lisbon agenda found that whilst overall Structural Funded aid has been of benefit to qualifying Regions and Member States there is room for improvement in the way projects are focused, developed and implemented. The following summary of issues identified by the EU review (and reported in the Lisbon evaluation document) reveals some of the shortcomings:

- Need to enhance policy effectiveness
- Difficulties with the process
- Weak capacity
- Lack of strategic approach
- Poor integration of process
- Weak outcome assessment
- Need to strengthen leverage – “through financial engineering”
- Health remains a high value investment

THE EUREGIO III Project

The EUREGIO III research project funded by the EU to review the effectiveness of the health specific Structural Fund process arrived at similar conclusions. The project also builds on this knowledge to act as a knowledge broker and inform capacity building for Member States to help avoid these problems and develop SF policies and programmes that make better use of Structural Funds to “invest in health systems of the future”

Investing in health systems of the future

“Investing in health systems of the future” is a theme that has formed part of the Hungarian EU Presidency programme for health and which has drawn on evidence from the EUREGIO III project. Discussions between EU Health Ministers as part of the Presidency programme confirmed an intention to substantially improve the effectiveness of SF investment through:

- A more rigorous evaluation of previous SF projects to assess their impact on ‘transforming healthcare’ and to provide lessons for future investment and
- Establishing an expert pool of specialists to support Regions and MS in developing more innovative and transformative SF programmes.

The Hungarian Presidency Programme recommendations have now been discussed by the EU Council (6th June) and adopted. The ‘Conclusions’ of the Council are therefore highly relevant to future Structural Fund policy, for example:

- *“Investments in health should be acknowledged as a contributor to economic growth*
- *European Structural Funds resources can be used in complementing the financing of health sector development of eligible regions of Member States, because:*
 - ➔ *Achieving social cohesion, reducing major disparities and closing serious health gaps are of utmost importance;*
 - ➔ *Developing ‘new generational’ approaches to healthcare will require appropriate funding to foster transformation of health systems and rebalance investment towards new and sustainable care models and facilities;*
- *Recognising the importance of evidence-based policy-making and decision-making processes supported by adequate health information systems;*
- *Recognising that there is a need for sharing evidence on health systems’ modernisation and of new healthcare approaches;*
- *Moving away from hospital-centred systems towards integrated care systems;*
- *Make smarter use of EU Structural Funds which can contribute to health systems innovation.*

These (and more) elements of the Council's Conclusions will form the basis for improving the effectiveness of Structural Fund policy and will almost certainly bring more rigour to the policy-making and decision-making process.

There is an opportunity for MS to take advantage of this new insight about SF strategy and build on the research knowledge and expertise generated by the EUREGIO III project.

EUREGIO III as a point of reference

The EUREGIO III project has revised its portfolio of case studies to support this new direction and is currently undertaking a thematic analysis of projects prior to them being made available on the website. The website already contains a range of non-SF capital projects which can be reliably used for reference as representing leading edge investments that in almost all cases would meet the newly emergent decision criteria. However, we are also adding to available ESF case studies.