

Local Partnerships, Romania¹

Description of the approach

This model² comprises a formal Pact at Regional Level, an Employment and Social Inclusion partnership at county level and several project partnerships at local level. It constitutes the employment governance model, building up participative processes of policy making and policy delivery while making optimum use of the financial instruments available, such as structural funds.

Employment agreements are, in this context, a form of social agreement aiming to promote employment through the mobilisation of all available resources for a joint strategy to create jobs and help to better coordinate and integrate employment policies. This involves efforts by the partners to identify difficulties, concerns and expectations of the players in the area of employment.

The structure and functionalities are presented in the diagram and described in the following paragraphs. It is important to stress that the relationships shown in the diagram are never hierarchical.

A) Regional Level (Regional Pact)

At Regional level, there should be a structure with a vision for the development of the human resources of the region and the ability to **insert this vision into strategic guidelines and priorities within the national framework** as set forth in the Regional Employment Plan. This Plan is the instrument for action.

For this reason, it is paramount that the structure takes the form of a policy committee that includes all the relevant stakeholders, in each case represented at high level for it is a decision making and regulatory body that translates the necessary legally recognised status of the Pact.

The Pact must be supported by a **technical permanent secretariat (TPS)** to facilitate the partnership's work and implement the relationships with the other levels (regional and local) in order to stimulate the development of projects and suitable forms of cooperation at the local level.

The President of the Regional Pact shall be elected among the members.

B) County Level employment and social inclusion partnerships

This level has an important role including definition of strategy at County level as a contribution to the Regional Action Plan but also an operational role of guidance and stimulation at the local level.

This partnership is of particular importance in the structure since:

- It translates the strategies from other levels into the County level (translation of the guidelines and priorities set at Regional level to be used as framework for the County).
- It analyses the problems and opportunities of the County and identifies the corresponding actions taking account of inputs from the local level.

To perform its responsibilities and tasks this structure needs:

1. To be organised as a **plenary body with several working groups specialised in the problem areas given priority in the Regional Plan**, and
2. To have the support of a **technical permanent secretariat (TPS)** which will facilitate the partnerships' work and their relationships with the other levels (regional and local), and stimulate the development of projects and of suitable forms of cooperation at the local level.

To do this, the TPS will identify and support local structures (Local Agenda 21 in municipalities, Project departments in universities, umbrella NGOs, etc) who will expand the possibilities open to the local actors.

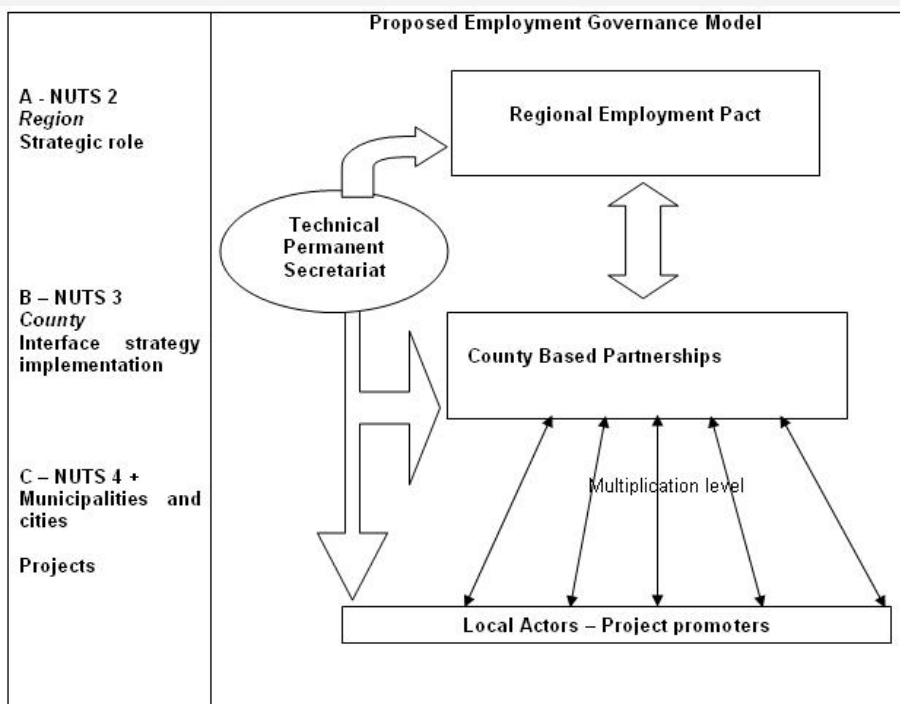
1. Source: Maria João Filgueiras- Rauch (2007), in: "Building Effective Local Partnerships: Organisational Challenges and Strategic Orientations". OECD LEED Trento Centre Capacity Building Local Governance and Partnerships.

2. Source: Maria João Filgueiras- Rauch – Report of the Phare project "Support to Ministry of labour, Social solidarity and Family to design and implement employment policy" – 2006.

This will in turn help to disseminate awareness of the partnership approach more widely, maximising the group empowerment effect through the ESF project framework.

C) Local Level (project partnerships)

The local level is the level at which most projects will be undertaken. This is also the level at which operational partnerships have to emerge to generate synergies, but more especially to improve the capacity of the actors to design and develop more complex projects under the ESF within the framework of the REAP.



D) Technical Permanent Secretariat

Management Unit – This unit has a manager responsible for all financial and functional operations of the TAG. Its role in the Pact is to perform the duties of a Secretariat and it may, if requested by the members, act as moderator of sessions. Administrative and Financial staff provide logistical services for the Pact such as preparation of the sessions (invitations, choice of locations, catering facilities, etc), draft the minutes of meetings and are responsible for their contents.

Technical Staff (facilitators) are required to support the content work and are responsible for the full support of the development and consolidation of the partnerships, at County level or at project level – local project partnerships – as the case may be.

Expected qualifications:

1. Familiarity with the labour market and the social situation in the region as well as the actors of the counties and their ability to conceive and develop projects.
2. Very good communication skills.
3. Ability to anticipate potential problems and difficulties and take preventive action.
4. Good knowledge of English (necessary spoken and preferably also written).
5. Solid experience in the provision of technical assistance and the accompaniment of projects with a view to the empowerment of the actors.

Why the approach is relevant?

Romania's administrative structure is characterised by a centralised decision-taking authority, where most implementation is located at county level, and virtually no regional governance is present. This creates a problem of identity even when Regions are created by law. It takes a long time for the actors to develop a true sense of legitimacy and identity. There is the need to transmute mental attitudes from an individual, competition-oriented approach to a participative and collaborative one. The diversity of the characteristics of the regions raises another issue - the adaptation of the model to take account of the specificities of each Region. This model has so far displayed the requisite flexibility.

The Romanian Model was designed to overcome these problems and it has reached a degree of survival capability that bodes well for its sustainability. It can accordingly play a useful mentoring role in supporting other countries' further development of its own model.

This Model also works on the basis of the integration of different partnerships under a policy making partnership umbrella – the Pact. This could be the most appropriate way to implement the recommendation that one model integrating different levels of governance should be established. The difficulties that were experienced with the implementation of the TPS provide a useful lesson when a country applies for ESF resources to support the costs of the Partnerships. The Public Procurement procedure was used in Romania because of the decision to create an NGO (or to use one existing already) for the TPS. However, other options should be looked into, for example, creation of a public organisation with a coordination function at central level, with executive branches in each region designated in the Pacts.

Reasons for the success or failure

To be able to accomplish its objectives the Pact must integrate the different levels of governance, make synergetic use of all the endogenous resources available and multiply the partnerships' capacity to design projects and act as real instruments of development and allocation of financial resources. This calls for the Pacts to involve as many partners with responsibilities in the field of employment as possible, including related public authorities, employers' associations and trade unions and other social and economic players such as third sector organisations.

Problems and needs are often met at local level. To ensure that they are addressed within the regional strategy, a bottom-up mechanism must be put in place to analyse the problems and work out proposals for action at county level drawing on inputs from the local level. Experience with several European partnerships shows that this combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches is an important factor in the success of the partnership model. It is important to stress here that Romania is a country with a central decision policy level (NUT1), almost no Regional structures (they are being built up to meet the requirements for EU accession), a wide range of institutional policy delivery and coordination capacity installed at county level (NUT 3) and administrative operational capacity at municipal level (NUT 4 or less). The partnership model had to build up the strategic decision-making capacity at regional level while simultaneously integrating the extensive delivery capacity existing at county level. This process is a long one and requires patience since the competition between counties and the lack of a common identity as a region creates a wide range of agendas and interests which need to be managed. It is extremely important to keep up the pace and to "reinvent" the necessary common interests at virtually a moment's notice. In Romania, the strongest common interest is the need to make the most exhaustive possible use of the available structural funds. This motivates the different organisations to come together regularly for the necessary preparations and to build up the project pipelines. In building up partnerships, the importance of the existence of resources for common action is evident. Only in this way it is possible to reinforce the common identity.

Another important issue to be resolved was the leadership of the Pact, given the member organisations' divergent interests. To secure acceptance by the partners, the leadership was made subject to election by the Partnership. At the same time a general regulation for the Pact and for the County partnerships was worked out, establishing this and other useful rules for the functioning of the partnerships.

This STP will be financed through the ESF for the next programming period. However, there have been some difficulties in creating the new structures. On the one hand, the national legislative framework is not adapted to support the new types of structures and on the other hand, the EU regulations impose several limitations and procedures on the conduct of activities financed by ESF resources. At time of writing, the difficulties had been almost overcome, but the negotiations took several months; such delays are a risk for the early years of existence of partnerships.

Another consequence of failure to set up a TPS is the absence of a budget allocation. This budget was planned to be around 0.5 million Euros over the first 3 years. The final decision will be depend on the outcome of the Tender Procedure now being launched

Contact details and website for further information

Ms Cristina Iova
General Director
ESF Managing Authority
Ministry of Labour, Social Solidarity and Family
E-mail: icristina@fseromania.ro