

European Structural and Investment Funds 2014-2020 Programmes

Horizontal Themes

This guidance seeks to provide information on the Horizontal Themes which are embedded in the European Social Fund (ESF) and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) programmes, the regulatory framework underpinning them and their role in the application and monitoring process.

Applicants must ensure that the three themes of: Sustainable Development, Equal Opportunities and Non-Discrimination, and Equality Between Men and Women are reflected in all ESF and ERDF Strategic Interventions and Operations. All Strategic Interventions and Operations should demonstrate through the application process how they will support each of these three strands in addition to the delivery of the operation to achieve the goals of the specific thematic objective which the operation is focussed on.

During delivery, Lead Partners and Delivery Agents should ensure these principles are embedded in the delivery of Operations and that evidence of the actions taken can be demonstrated.

Sustainable Development

Sustainable Development is described by the European Commission as “*specific actions to take into account environmental protection requirements, resource efficiency, climate change mitigation and adaptation, disaster resilience and risk prevention and management*”¹. It is one of the Horizontal Themes to ensure that the programmes are delivered “in line with the principle of sustainable development and with the Union’s promotion of the aim of preserving, protecting and improving the quality of the environment”¹ and all Strategic Interventions and Operations across ESF and ERDF activity are expected to contribute towards this goal.

The Scottish programmes are committed to delivering actions towards this across the programmes, in particular through:

- ERDF Thematic Objective 4: Supporting the shift towards a low-carbon economy in all sectors
- ERDF Thematic Objective 6: Preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency

In addition to the focused Strategic Interventions and Operations within these areas of the programme, all Strategic Interventions and Operations, seeking or receiving support through programme, should consider the impact the action will have in contributing to sustainable development. At application stage, applicants should consider the impact which the operation may have on environmental protection requirements, resource efficiency, climate change mitigation and carbon reduction, disaster resilience and risk prevention and

¹ Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 – Article 8

management, and identify potential mitigating actions which will be undertaken during the delivery of the operation.

To assist with this task, applicants should consult Scottish Government guidance, policies and news on the environment and climate change: <https://www.gov.scot/environment-and-climate-change/>.

Within some activity, and in particular in the ESF programme, it is acknowledged that Sustainable Development may not be directly applicable in the same way as for projects which involve capital expenditure. In these cases, it is reasonable to demonstrate how sustainable development is integrated in the Strategic Interventions and Operations in other ways, such as to:

- Promote environmental awareness and good practice in the implementation of activity;
- Integrate sustainable development into Strategic Interventions and Operations undertaking awareness raising education and training programmes;
- Support participating employers to adopt or improve Environmental Sustainability Strategies;
- Promote social justice and equality of opportunity; and
- Recognise and promote health and wellbeing as one of the corner stones of a healthy, vibrant economy.

Equal Opportunities and Non-Discrimination

The principles of Equal Opportunities and Non-Discrimination are outlined in the Common Provisions Regulation, which requires that programmes “*shall take appropriate steps to prevent any discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation during the preparation and implementation of programmes. In particular, accessibility for persons with disabilities shall be taken into account throughout the preparation and implementation of programmes*”².

All Strategic Interventions and Operations seeking funding through the Scottish ESF and ERDF programmes should demonstrate that they have considered the impact of the supported activities on those groups outlined in the regulation. The applicant must ensure that the operation application includes a description of specific actions to actively prevent discrimination. This may include, for example, supporting vulnerable and socially excluded citizens through the delivery of specific activities and programmes that will address barriers to services.

To assist with this task, applicants should consult Scottish Government guidance, policies and news on equalities: <https://www.gov.scot/equality-and-rights/>.

Applicants should ensure that the activity detailed within the Operation is designed to take account of the needs of the various target groups at risk of discrimination and in particular the requirements for ensuring accessibility for persons with disabilities.

Where Strategic Interventions and Operations are not targeted to support individuals directly, applicants should still consider the impact the operation will have on the relevant sectors.

For example, this may include:

- Ensure access to applications for funding are available and accessible to all, particularly for people in rural areas, older people, disabled people
- Encourage entrepreneurship and business start-up initiatives to encourage more take up from young people, women, minority ethnic, disabled people and LGBTI people
- Ensure access to technology is available and accessible to all, particularly for people in rural areas, older people, disabled and others affected by the ‘digital divide’

² Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 – Article 7

Equality Between Men and Women

The principle of Equality Between Men and Women is outlined in the Commons Provisions regulation, which requires that programmes “*shall ensure that equality between men and women and the integration of gender perspective are taken into account and promoted throughout the preparation and implementation of programmes, including in relation to monitoring, reporting and evaluation*”².

All Strategic Interventions and Operations seeking funding through the Scottish ESF and ERDF programmes must demonstrate that they have considered the contribution of the supported activities to promote equality between men and women, ensuring that the Operation application includes a description of specific actions the applicant intends to take to actively support equality. This may include developing engagement routes for all groups working within local communities and agencies, promoting dialogue and establishing links with those furthest from the labour market.

To assist with this task, applicants should consult Scottish Government guidance, policies and news on gender equality: <https://www.gov.scot/policies/gender-equality/>.

Applicants should ensure that the **activity detailed within the** Operation is designed to take account of the needs of the various target groups at risk of such discrimination and in particular the requirements for ensuring accessibility for persons with disabilities.

Where Strategic Interventions and Operations are not targeted to support individuals directly, applicants should still consider the impact the operation will have on equality between men and women. For example, this might include:

- Encourage entrepreneurship and business start-up initiatives to encourage more take up from women
- Support the creation of an environment which supports inclusive work places, which promotes equality of opportunity for staff, including the reconciliation of work and private life
- Improving women’s representation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)

Regulatory Framework

The role of the Horizontal Themes is established in the Common Provisions Regulation and detailed specifically in Articles 7 and 8 of the regulation: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/legislation/regulations/.

Article 50 of the Common Provisions Regulation requires that an Implementation Report is submitted by the Managing Authority every year of the programme period. Paragraph 4, of the Regulations, specifies that the MA must report on “*the implementation of actions to take into account the principles set out in Articles 7 and 8*” – the Horizontal Themes. It is therefore vital that applicants, through delivery of the Strategic Interventions and Operations are able to provide evidence of delivery to the MA to ensure the completion of this report.

The Scottish Governments plans for the delivery of the Horizontal Themes in the 2014-2020 Programmes is outlined in Chapter 11 of the respective Operational Programmes: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/esif-operational-programmes-2014-2020/>.

In addition to this, applicants are reminded of the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, which brought together existing equality legislation. It focuses on people with the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, race, sex, sexual orientation and religion and belief: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

Application process

At application stage, applicants seeking ESF or ERDF funding are required to outline the systems which are in place to address the Horizontal Themes.

Within a Strategic Intervention application or extension, this is focussed on the implementation and monitoring of activity that will address these areas. Within an Operation application or extension, this is focussed on the delivery in each area and applicants are requested to consider existing issues or barriers, how this will be addressed, how this will be monitored and how you will know there has been acceptable progress.

In each case, the Managing Authority will consider the actions which are outlined and assess the proposed activity as part of the application or extension process.

Delivery and Monitoring

It is essential that all activity linked to the Strategic Intervention and Operation(s) is captured and reviewed by Lead Partners and Delivery Agents. This will allow the activity to be assessed and the success of that activity measured against the aims specified within the Strategic Intervention and Operation(s).

When an Operation is being delivered, the Horizontal Themes will continue to be monitored and reviewed throughout the delivery of the programme:

- At the Article 125 Stage 2 check, delivery agents will be asked to confirm the responsible person for compliance with each of the three themes, to demonstrate compliance with the themes and, where there are partners or sub-contractors, what procedures are in place to ensure that Horizontal Themes are addressed throughout the Operation.
- As the Managing Authority is required to report on examples of the Horizontal Themes being implemented throughout the programme, case studies of positive examples of Sustainable development, Equal opportunities and non-discrimination or Equality between men and women in existing or approved projects are welcome. These can be submitted through the relevant Portfolio and Compliance Manager or Officer or to europeanstructuralfunds@gov.scot. Where an individual is referred to in a case study, please refer to the publicity guidance, and in particular the template consent forms: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/esif-publicity-requirements-2014-2020/>.