

European Competence Centre for Social Innovation:  
Community of Practice on Employment, Education and Skills,  
Community of Practice on Material Support and  
Community of Practice on Migrant Integration

# **The First Joint Online Event of the Three Communities of Practice**

## **Summary report**

20 March 2025 (online)



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## 1. Background information

### 1.1 Objectives

The first joint event of the three Communities of Practice (CoPs) on Employment, Education and Skills (EES); Material Support (MS); and Migrant Integration (MI) was designed as a peer review aimed to explore how integrated approaches that combine material support with training, employment, and integration services can more effectively address poverty and social exclusion among vulnerable groups, including migrants.

The main objectives of the event were to:

- Share effective practices that combine material support with employment and integration services, with a specific focus on people in vulnerable situations, including migrants.
- Discuss how synergies between material support and upskilling or employment pathways can be effectively designed and implemented under ESF+.
- Identify challenges and success factors in organising inclusive, coordinated services across sectors and stakeholders.
- Encourage stakeholders to support coordinated service delivery and to consider how the existing funding mechanisms can enable more integrated and person-centred approaches.

### 1.2 Target group

The event brought together a diverse group of stakeholders from the three CoPs, including:

- Representatives of Managing Authorities at national and regional level;
- Public employment and social service providers;
- Non-governmental organisations and civil society actors engaged in the provision of material support, training, and migrant integration services;
- Representatives of the European Commission and other EU-level institutions.

### 1.3 Number of participants

The event welcomed 116 participants.

### 1.4 Geographical and typology spread

- Participants registered from the 23 following member states: AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, HR, EE, ES, FI, FR, GR, HR, IE, IT, LT, LV, MT, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI.
- In terms of affiliation, the participants included representatives from various organisations, such as: 31 National Managing Authority, 4 Regional Managing Authority, 7 Line Ministries, 8 Implementing Organisations, 5 Intermediate Bodies, 14 representatives from NGOs, 8 Non-profit organisations, 24 EC and 15 other stakeholders.

## 2. Main findings

### 2.1 Key outcomes

The event was opened by **Neringa Poškutė** (Head of the Social Innovation Competence Group at the European Social Fund Agency), who emphasised the importance of strengthening cooperation between stakeholders and promoting more inclusive ESF+ interventions. She was followed by thematic experts from the three CoPs: **Ágota Scharle** (lead thematic expert, CoP on EES), **Erika Borg** (thematic expert, CoP on MI) and **Rimgailė Baltutė** (lead thematic expert, CoP on MS). They jointly introduced the rationale for the event, highlighting the shared aim of strengthening service coordination to better support vulnerable groups. They stressed the potential of combining material support with training and integration services, especially under ESF+, and highlighted the importance of inclusive, person-centred approaches.

Three practices were presented to showcase how material support can be effectively combined with employment and integration services:

**Estelle Tovoli** (Institutional Relations Officer – Les Restos du Cœur, France) presented a well-established national model that combines large-scale material support with targeted social inclusion services, reaching over 1.3 million individuals annually. Within the framework of the ESF+, beneficiaries receive support beyond material support through accompanying measures, such as tailored services like French language courses, job counselling, and social integration workshops. She highlighted a structured partnership with *France Travail* (formerly *Pôle emploi*, a French

government agency that registers unemployed people, helps them find jobs and provides them with financial aid), which enhances outreach to individuals who are often overlooked by public services and facilitates their connection to sustainable employment opportunities.

**Ana Mansoa** (Executive Director of Centro Padre Alves Correia – CEPAC, Portugal) and **Mariana Hancock** (Communication and Advocacy Officer – Mercearia Social Sabura, Portugal) presented an innovative, community-based approach aimed at supporting migrants, asylum seekers, and individuals with irregular status. Although the project is partly funded through the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) rather than ESF+, it was included in the event to illustrate a promising model that could be adapted for ESF+ interventions. The practice combines the provision of food and essential goods through a dignified, choice-based model with access to tailored services such as language training, legal support, and financial literacy.

**Riikka Flink** (Project manager at Lahti Diaconia Foundation – Dila, Finland), showcased a local food aid initiative that integrates material support with skills development and low-threshold employment opportunities. The project operates an online food aid shop where long-term unemployed individuals are engaged in tasks such as inventory management, logistics, and e-commerce operations. Participants take part in supported work placements within the food distribution process. The model emphasises low-threshold access and gradual re-engagement, allowing individuals to build routine, confidence, and work habits in a supportive environment.

The event was followed by interactive workshops where participants explored how material support can foster access to training and integration services, the role of NGOs in delivering flexible support, and how coordinated service models can enhance accessibility and effectiveness. Discussions were facilitated by thematic experts: Márton Csillag & Rimgailė Baltutė (Group 1), Erika Borg & Ágota Scharle (Group 2), and Jörg Markowitsch & Angela Frigo (Group 3). For the main findings, please see Annex 3.

This was followed by short presentations by the thematic experts **Jörg Markowitsch**, **Aistė Adomavičienė** and **Erika Borg** on the resources available through the three CoPs and an invitation for continued exchange through Teams channels. The final remarks by **Aurélien Mornon Afonso** and **Laura Mangeng** (Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission) underscored the value of cross-CoP collaboration and encouraged participants to build on the shared insights to strengthen ESF+ implementation. They also extended an invitation to participants to make use of the “Learning and Expert Visits” available via the ESF+ Support Centre<sup>1</sup>.

## 2.2 Participant feedback during the event

Participant contributions throughout the event reflected a strong engagement with the topic and broad agreement on the value of integrated service models. Several recurring themes and considerations emerged from the plenary and breakout sessions:

- Material support was widely recognised as an **effective tool for engaging hard-to-reach groups**. Participants stressed the value of multilingual communication, culturally sensitive outreach, and flexible service points.
- **Interest in peer learning** was evident, with offers of future exchange, collaboration, and continued dialogue. Participants expressed an interest in following up on the practices presented and exploring their adaptability to other national contexts.
- Many underlined the **strengths of NGO-led models** in providing person-centred, trust-based and non-discriminatory support. Participants noted the added value of NGOs not only as service providers but also as advocates for their communities.
- **Participation and empowerment** emerged as recurring concepts. Several discussions highlighted how involving beneficiaries as volunteers, peer workers, or contributors to service design can increase both trust and effectiveness.
- Several participants shared **positive experiences of collaborating with public authorities**, although others pointed to **challenges in navigating complex administrative requirements** or ensuring early NGO involvement in programme design.

## 1.3 Impact

- Strengthened participants’ understanding of how material support can serve as an effective entry point to training, employment, and integration services, particularly for migrants and other vulnerable groups.

1 The expression of interest form is available via this link: <https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/p2p-support-form>.

- Provided insights into the practical application of the ESF+ requirement to link material support with accompanying measures, thereby supporting more coherent and person-centred interventions.
- Stimulated dialogue on **how to enhance cooperation between NGOs and public agencies**, highlighting the need for flexible funding and simplified procedures.
- Encouraged continued engagement of participants, with several expressing interest in further peer learning activities, bilateral cooperation, and follow-up of the practices presented.
- Reinforced the role of the CoPs as a platform for structured dialogue, encouraging continued exchange on how to design and implement support under ESF+.
- Improved participants' knowledge of the three different CoPs, their objectives, key activities, and their role in the ESF+ framework, fostering greater engagement and alignment with ongoing initiatives.

### 3. Lessons learned

The event saw active participation in both plenary and breakout sessions, with participants sharing practical experiences, challenges, and suggestions for improving integrated service delivery. The combination of case presentations and moderated discussions allowed for a balanced exchange of insights, although some participants noted the limited time available for deeper exploration of specific operational models.

### 4. Next steps

#### 4.1 Follow-up actions

- A follow-up on-site event is planned for November 2025, which will build on the themes and lessons from this joint session and provide additional space for peer learning and dialogue across the three CoPs.
- Thematic experts will reflect on the insights gathered to inform future work within each CoP, including the possible development of joint guidance or a policy paper on integrated support models under ESF+, with a focus on improving outreach, accessibility, and coordination across sectors.

### Annexes

Annex 1: [Event agenda](#)

Annex 2: [Presentations from the event](#)

Annex 3: Key findings from the breakout rooms

